

# ANNUAL ASSESSMENT

the situation and dynamics  
of the jewish people

2020 | 5780

**THE JEWISH PEOPLE  
AT A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS**

Implications, Dilemmas,  
and Recommendations



המכון למדיניות העם היהודי (מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ (חל"צ)

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William Davidson Foundation

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Robert Immerman, Sandy Gottesman,

Mitchell Julis, Art Samberg, Paul Singer, and the  
Wilf Family Foundation for their kind support

With fond memories of Alex Grass z"l  
and Jack Kay z"l



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## The Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People

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Implications, Dilemmas, and Recommendations

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Jerusalem 2020/5780

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Printed and Distributed by the Jewish People Policy Institute

Graphic Design: Lotte Design

ISBN 978-965-7549-30-8

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# 1

## OPENING REMARKS

By Avinoam Bar-Yosef

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah 5781, we present the Jewish People Policy Institute's *Annual Assessment of the Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People* under the unique reality of the global coronavirus crisis. The pandemic has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths around the world. It has also sparked an economic crisis, and has raised the specter of a fundamental change in the world order. COVID-19 was a catalyst for the establishment of Israel's new unity government. Having eased earlier lockdown measures in a bid to gradually restart the economy, we now face a resurgence of the virus.

Israel's new unity government was supposed to end a turbulent political period in which three separate elections were held in the space of a year. However, the landscape of governance has proved to be anything but smooth. Israel

has a coalition, but it doesn't appear to have the necessary partnership to move the country forward. The trust between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz was critically hobbled by their rivalry across the three consecutive campaigns.

It looked like the year might go down as among the most challenging in the history of the state until just a few weeks ago, when the normalization process between Israel and the United Arab Emirates was announced. This is perceived as a significant positive development, and with the expectation that other Sunni states will follow may even represent a regional paradigm shift. It shows that Israel's essential strength has not been damaged despite the crises. Most of the Sunni leaders prefer an alliance with the Jewish state (even if yet kept quiet) than

with Shiite fundamentalists who threaten their vision of a modern future. This is good news for Israel, the Jewish people, and the Middle East.

On the face of it, the pandemic could, in theory, draw attention away from other serious challenges facing the Jewish people and the State of Israel. But critical developments are forcing the government to take major decisions in several areas, despite the shaky nature of the coalition:

- A. Iran's continued pursuit of its nuclear program, and the growing power of Iran-sponsored terrorist organizations.
- B. The normalization process with UAE put on hold the annexation of parts of Judea and Samaria (as stipulated in the Trump plan), but it has created even greater frustration in the Palestinian camp. And this remains a critical challenge in the region. It should be noted that the annexation as laid out in the Trump peace initiative created a very difficult Jewish dilemma: on the one hand, it presents an historic opportunity to exercise our forefathers' rights to the Biblical homeland, while on the other hand, it carries the danger of Israel becoming a binational state and losing its Jewish identity. This dilemma was divisive among Israelis. Even if a recent poll found that 75 percent of Israelis favor the UAE deal over annexation, there remains a significant segment of Israeli society still pushing for extending Israeli sovereignty.

C. The unprecedented political polarization in the United States, which is affecting Jewish attitudes toward Israel, especially among the younger generation.

D. A worsening trend of anti-Semitism, which threatens Jewish communities around the world, exacerbates the damage wrought by the coronavirus. This convergence of the pandemic and Jew hatred could potentially increase Aliyah to Israel, especially among communities committed to a Jewish way of life; it could also alienate other Jews.

The last weeks allowed us to relate to the nascent normalization process with the Sunni states in this Annual Assessment. This report also discusses the situation and dynamics of the Jewish people, with an emphasis on the pandemic and its ramifications. It addresses other major issues on the agenda. It presents a snapshot of the Jewish world and its major dilemmas. JPPI provides professional analysis and offers operative policy recommendations for decision-makers. JPPI submits its Assessment to the government each year, in accordance with a decision made in 2004 by then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon z"l, and to Jewish organizations worldwide.

I would like to thank Shmuel Rosner for heading the project these last few years, and I will also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of his predecessors since the first edition, which was under the leadership of Brig. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilboa and Professor Sergio Della Pergola.

Since 2004, the Annual Assessment, JPPI's flagship project, has provided decision-makers in Israel and the Diaspora with a set of professional tools in five main dimensions: geopolitical developments affecting the Jewish people; identity and identification; bonds between communities; demography; and material resources and influence capacities.

This preface is also, for me, a personal opportunity to bid farewell to JPPI: I am expecting to retire later this fall after 18 years, since the Institute's founding.

The Jewish People Policy Institute was established in order to fill a gap in the Jewish-people policy planning sphere – to provide a global perspective rooted in a deep commitment to Jewish communities worldwide, and recognizing Israel as the Jewish people's core country. This implies a clear commitment of the Jewish state to world Jewry's continued existence and flourishing.

It isn't easy to give advice. In order to be heard and to have real impact, JPPI has recruited the best policy minds of the Jewish people, which represent the full ideological spectrum, from left to right and from Haredi to secular on two levels: leadership and staff.

I am proud that we've succeeded in creating a common professional language, one that doesn't shirk from controversy, that strives for mutual understanding, and is capable of representing the policy dilemmas in all their intensity.

This effort could not have borne fruit had major figures from the policy world not mobilized. Notable among these are: JPPI's Co-Chairs Ambassador Dennis Ross and Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat; Elliott Abrams; former Chief Justice of the Israeli Supreme Court Miriam Naor; former Canadian Minister of Justice Irwin Cotler; former Jewish Agency Chairmen Ambassador Sallai Meridor and Natan Sharansky; current JAFI Chairman Isaac Herzog; former Federation CEOs Steve Hoffman, Dr. John Ruskay, and Dr. Steven Nasatir; current Federation of New York CEO Eric Goldstein; Isaac Molho; Sami Friedrich; and to my dear colleagues Ambassador Avi Gil, Brig. General Michael Herzog, Dr. Shalom Wald, and Projects Coordinator Ita Alcalay for their highly appreciated contribution. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Yehezkel Dror, who contributed greatly to establishing the highest-quality professionalism of the Institute.

JPPI owes its accomplishments, first and foremost, to the caliber of its fellows – their professionalism and dedication. I would like to thank everyone, from the bottom of my heart, for their cooperation, and wish JPPI continued success. My wish for the leaders of Israel and world Jewry is that they make the right decisions, taking advantage of JPPI's products. May they navigate a wise course for the Jewish people that will bring us to secure and peaceful harbors.

**Avinoam Bar-Yosef**  
President and Founding Director

# 2

## FOREWORD

By Dennis Ross and Stuart Eizenstat

JPPI's Annual Assessment of the Situation and Dynamics of the Jewish People offers a yearly snapshot of how Israel and the Jewish world are doing. Geopolitics, communal bonds, demography, identity and identification, and resources are the measures that are used to compare each year to its predecessor and prospectively to what may be coming. Analytically, this approach has provided a good means for evaluating how well Israel and different Jewish communities are doing—indeed, are they thriving, declining or remaining largely static—and how might their direction be influenced.

This year's report, while clear on the realities of 2019, is understandably affected by COVID-19 and all the uncertainties associated with it. This historic pandemic will have far-reaching impacts, still not discernable, in the way we work, communicate, travel, worship, and support

Jewish and communal institutions, and in our view of the role of government and globalization. After the pandemic subsides the “new normal” will not look entirely like the world before it. The report very usefully identifies many of the unknowns about how the coronavirus is going to shape the future from the international consequences to the differing possibilities for the Jewish world. Because it respects no borders and no one can be safe until there is an effective vaccine, will we see COVID-19 foster greater international cooperation—and strengthen international institutions? Or will it feed populist/nationalist tendencies building walls figuratively and literally on trade, immigration, and travel? Leaders like Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban have used the pandemic to cement authoritarian rule while weakening independence of the media and judiciary.

At this point, the answer is not clear, but one thing that history tells us is that if the populist, extreme nationalist impulse tends to predominate, it is always accompanied by an increase in the rejection of “the other”—and Jews have always been the quintessential other. Globalization, which greatly benefits Israel as a major exporter of high tech products, has clearly suffered a direct blow. In the early stages of responding to the pandemic, countries began taking a more protectionist, national view to assure they would have sufficient medical resources that can be produced at home, rather than being shared. There has been some easing of this hoarding instinct in the last few months. Nonetheless, the risk of a great economic downturn which is almost certainly going to characterize the reality in many countries in the coming year is not only likely to foster a populist response but also compound the trend of growing anti-Semitism. The Assessment’s discussion on the large number of Jews in Europe who already feel the need to hide their Jewish identity sends a chilling message about the state of anti-Semitism even before the full effect of COVID-19 is felt economically.

As for the geopolitical discussion, the US-Chinese competition, what some are already calling a new Cold War, will certainly affect Israel. Caught in the middle, Israel is likely to be subject to real pressures from the Trump administration on Chinese investment in Israeli infrastructure—ports, rail lines and communications infrastructure—and Israeli trade in the high tech

sector. The concerns about Chinese influence are also bipartisan in the US. The costs to Israel will be real, but the need for Israel to work out understandings with the US will be essential. And it is not clear how much a change in the US administration would alter the American views of what Israel does with the Chinese, especially in terms of technology development.

US global leadership, upon which Israel depends, and which had already eroded under the Trump administration’s “America First” foreign policy, has been strikingly absent during the pandemic. Unlike other presidents, Republican and Democrat, who helped lead the G20 during the financial crisis in 2008-09 and at other times, and who marshalled support for the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF during other health crises, the administration has not done so. On the contrary, it has suspended payments to the WHO and refused to respond to the IMF’s request for additional funding to help developing and emerging nations face the COVID-19 crisis with inadequate health infrastructures. Israel has worked hard to build relationships with many of these countries and there is now an opportunity for Israel’s government to provide medical assistance to them—something that would help address the immediate needs of the people in these states and obviously boost Israel’s standing with them.

The pandemic has not changed Iran’s aggressive posture toward the region. It has neither slowed its actions in Syria and Iraq nor constrained its

precision guidance project designed to threaten Israel with far more accurate missiles. With Hezbollah alone having more than 130,000 missiles lacking terminal guidance, this is a strategic threat. Notwithstanding the real economic hardship from sanctions and the searing effect of the pandemic in Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) is being given more power at the expense of Iran's relatively more pragmatic government and even the clerics. The IRGC's responsibilities reflect the militarization of the Iranian government, and despite its setbacks—the killing of Qassem Soleimani and the downing of the Ukrainian airliner—the IRGC favors a more confrontational posture toward the outside world both to divert attention from domestic failings and to justify stricter internal controls. Put simply, IRGC is likely to see its stakes as being even greater in Syria and Lebanon now and be determined to do more, at least on the precision guidance project.

In reality, however, Iran is not doing well in the region. Domestically, its economy remains largely in free fall due not only to onerous US sanctions, but also to the mismanagement and corruption of the regime. Externally, Iran is increasingly blamed for the dysfunction, terrible governance and economic decline of those countries where it wields great influence through proxies. Only those who depend on Iran for material support—Hezbollah in Lebanon, the different Shia militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and Bashar al Assad in Syria—look to Iran as a model. For everyone else, its model is a failure—and the threats it

poses in the region certainly have contributed to Israel developing at least covert relations with Sunni Arab leaderships. And now, with the breakthrough between Israel and the UAE, at least with the Emirates, the relations will no longer be under the table or largely invisible. But it is not just shared threat perceptions and common security concerns that drove this breakthrough, it was also the recognition that the two most dynamic and technologically driven economies in the region could gain even more through cooperating in areas of health, water, agriculture and cyber.

Of course, something else drove the UAE; it understood that the only way to prevent unilateral Israeli annexation of the territories in the West Bank/Judea-Samaria allotted to it in the Trump peace plan—all 130 settlements and the Jordan Valley—was to give the Trump administration a reason to say no to annexation. The administration viewed its plan “holistically” and not simply as an annexation plan. And, by offering normalization in return for no annexation and easing of restrictions on arms sales to the UAE, it gave the administration a win and allowed it to say its policies were advancing peace in the region. Indeed, other states like Bahrain and Sudan may soon follow the UAE example.

While these two states and others may wait to see if there is any backlash or increased threats against the UAE for its decision to normalize, the reality is that the region is changing. There was no rush to condemn the UAE in either the

Arab League or the Organization of the Islamic Conference—though the Palestinian Authority sought to produce condemnatory resolutions in both. Only Iran, which made threats against the Emirates, Turkey, Sunni and Shia Islamists, and the Palestinian Authority and Hamas—was critical. The Palestinians felt betrayed; their hope to prevent all normalization with Israel so long as occupation continues has just been dashed. They have known that others are building quiet, under the table relations with Israel, which at least allowed the Palestinians to maintain the claim that there was a ceiling on what Israel could gain in the region in terms of the benefits of peace so long as it failed to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians. But the UAE signaled that others are simply not going to wait for the Palestinians; that changes from the common view of threats from Iran or al Qaeda or ISIS or from pandemics or from the need to create digitally-based economies must be dealt with and the region cannot be frozen. Israel is increasingly seen as a potentially helpful partner.

And as the catastrophic explosion in Beirut and the demonstrations there and in Iraq also signal, there is much less tolerance for the same old conspiracy theories or slogans for governing or for mobilizing support. This is also likely to be true for both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. To be sure, addressing problems cannot be avoided in many of the countries in the region. Of course, given the economic ravishes resulting from COVID-19, many of the countries in the

Middle East, not just those that identify with Iran, may face challenges from their publics in the absence of good governance or delivery of services and any kind of safety nets. That may prove less true for the oil rich states that have more of a financial cushion, but even these states are experiencing economic difficulties with the decline in oil prices and they will not have the same resources to bail out others in need in the region and that, too, could trigger upheaval in the area.

The international community, too, will have fewer resources to help regional states deal with their economic and health needs given the general economic decline caused by COVID-19. One last point on the international community and the implications of the Israel-UAE breakthrough. It has generally been welcomed. Not all are willing to forsake the Palestinian cause, but one consequence of the breakthrough is that by taking unilateral Israeli annexation off the table, a major exacerbating problem with the American Jewish community and the Diaspora more generally, with the Democratic Party in the United States, and with the Europeans has been avoided. Similarly, the annexation would have provided the BDS movement an extraordinary boost. Now, if Arab states do, in fact, follow the UAE example, BDS will lose even more. They would be calling for boycotts— and de-legitimization of Israel—while Arab states are openly engaging with it. None of this means that the Palestinian cause will disappear or that progressives will diminish their support

for it or that Israel will no longer face the risk of becoming a binational state if it does not find a way to address it. But it does mean that Palestinians are not going to be rescued by the international community either economically or politically and the Palestinian national movement is in need of some real soul searching.

On identity issues, the Assessment points out that the picture here is also mixed. Affiliation with synagogues has been declining but COVID-19 has produced expansive online Jewish learning and institutional programs. And, Reform and Conservative synagogues are holding Shabbat and prayer services digitally and getting large turnouts. Surely, some of that is tied to sheltering in place and looking for things to do, but those who begin to join these services may also find their spiritual needs being addressed and may well be more likely to affiliate. It is too soon to know but also too soon to write-off what may also be more positive outcomes. And yet the continuing trends on Jewish identification in the

Diaspora with synagogues and other communal institutions, low birthrates, and high rates of intermarriage without conversion to Judaism by the non-Jewish spouse are troubling.

As for resources and philanthropy, the Jewish communities will be hit like all others. The assessment acknowledges that but also points out that they may be hit less hard even while patterns of giving may also change.

With so much that is unknown, it is important at this stage to identify the key issues, highlight questions that must be asked, assess differing scenarios and anticipate what will need to be addressed as priorities in the near and medium term. JPPI's report does all that and offers one more very important thing: it offers perspective. And, perspective now is more important than ever at this remarkable time in our history.

**Stuart Eizenstat and Dennis Ross**  
**JPPI Co-Chairs**

# 2

## Policy Recommendations

### COVID-19 Crisis

JPPI recommends that Jewish communities concentrate on four main priorities in determining their budgets as long as the COVID-19 crisis continues: 1. Ensure the appropriate resources are secured to sustain its main institutions as they recover from the crisis; 2. Prioritize assistance to the Jewish community's most vulnerable members, individuals and groups; 3. Invest

in innovations spurred by the crisis that also have potential for future growth, such as online activities, and participate on behalf of the Jewish community in assisting the general population (Tikkun Olam); 4. Explore utilizing community financial reserves and funds earmarked for emergencies and nurturing the younger generations in this time of crisis.

### Aliyah

The international pandemic creates an opportunity to encourage Aliyah to Israel. In addition to economic considerations, Israel maintains Jewish quality of life when gathering in Jewish institutions is prohibited, and provides for Jewish expression in a space

relatively protected from harassment by radicals exploiting the crisis for anti-Semitic incitement. Israel also has the opportunity to encourage the return of Israelis living abroad by assuring new economic and social avenues for re-acclimation.

## Foreign Relations

Especially during the US presidential campaign, Israel should maintain a neutral position and avoid the appearance of support for one candidate or another. It is very important to maintain its good relationship with President Trump, but at the same time prepare for possible changes in American policy in the event of a Biden victory. The

political polarization in the United States threatens bipartisan sympathy for Israel. Therefore, it is recommended that Israel be willing to engage in an open dialogue with the next administration, even if concerned about its positions on the important issues of Iran and the Palestinian arena.

## Israel-China Relations

Tensions between the United States and China will likely continue for the foreseeable future and may even intensify in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Israel has a vital interest in expanding its flexibility and independence in its relations with the two powers. On one hand to further develop economic ties with China while, on the other hand, safeguarding its crucial and irreplaceable strategic relationship with the United States.

JPPI recommends that the Israeli government establish a strong center of China expertise under the auspices of the National Security Council. Its tasks should include: the formulation of a long-term strategy regarding Israel-China relations; bolstering mechanisms for overseeing foreign investment in Israel; include the Israel-China factor in the strategic dialogue with the US; and establishing a strategic dialogue with the Chinese government to deal with economic cooperation and geopolitical disputes.

## Relevant Recommendations from Previous Years

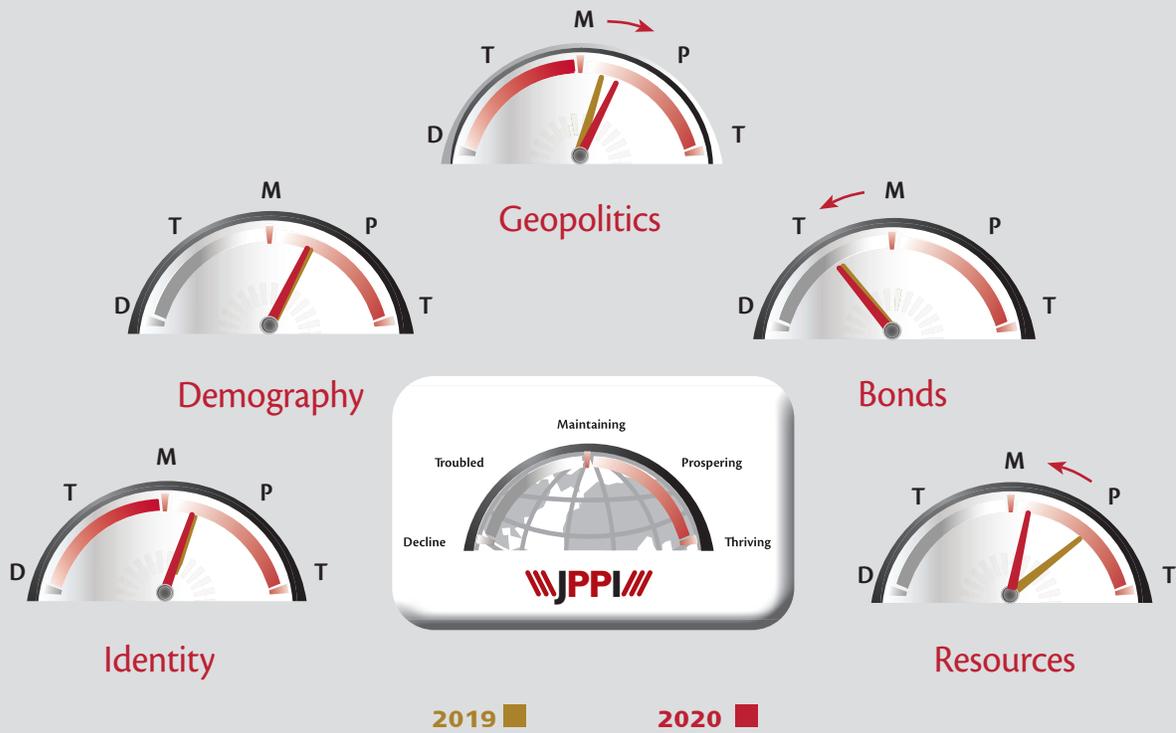
- Diaspora Jews should be encouraged to operate in the Asian continent in the fields of culture, art, academia and intellectual activity, with the aim of creating "soft power."
- The pragmatic policy of integrating the Haredim into the broader Israeli society should continue. Those Haredim who wish a form of integration must be allowed to maintain their unique identity in the IDF, national service, and the workforce. The Orthodox community, especially in the United States, should be encouraged to assume active roles in Jewish communal life and the general American society, and to increase their participation in politics and public service at the national level.
- Declining fertility in most Diaspora Jewish communities has led to an increase in the relative demographic weight of older age groups. This trend requires monitoring and the allocation of additional community resources to provide services to this population as it gradually retires and turns to other interests to fill its newfound free time. Among other things, Jewish educational opportunities tailored to this age group should be designed and expanded as the benefits would cascade down to the younger generations.

# TRENDS

# 4

## Integrated Net Assessment – Five Dimensions of Jewish Well-Being

Key Drivers Affecting the Jewish People, 2019-2020



As we publish this year's Annual Assessment, the entire global system, including the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora, is in a period of great uncertainty, replete with many risks but also opportunities to implement reforms and changes.

The health, economic, and governance crises affecting the entire world as a result of COVID-19 has dominated the year and is significantly impacting the Jewish people in many areas. These include through economic disruption, which affects how resources are divided among the Jewish people; the changing face of Jewish communal programming in the Diaspora and in Israel, as everything shifts from the physical to the digital sphere; a significant increase in anti-Semitic acts and sentiment, as the perpetrators take advantage of the current social distress caused by the pandemic to attack the Jewish people and spread messages of hate against it; and the difficulty within many Jewish communities around the world (including Israel), especially Haredi communities, to adjust to the social distancing required in this time of crisis, which has resulted in their higher infection rates relative to other segments of society.

The impact of the crisis on the geopolitical arena is evident in the shift of attention to new and urgent areas. The COVID-19 pandemic could also impact the domestic political arena in many countries as well as the global balance of power. Those who handle the crisis well and recover

quickly will come out strengthened, while others could weaken due to their inadequate response to the crisis and its consequences. At the time of this writing, it seems that both Israel and the United States, – home to the two largest Jewish communities in the world – have had difficulty managing the crisis. That said, the implications for the economic future are uncertain. When examining the long-term global implications of the crisis, we must consider the possibility that it could reinforce nationalistic and isolationist trends at the expense of globalization and international cooperation.

Alongside the crisis, it is worth recalling that Israel has undergone a year of political upheaval, which included three election cycles and culminated in the establishment of a unity government. As this upheaval came to an end, the American Jewish community entered a period of political tumult as the upcoming US presidential election approaches (November 3, 2020). This comes against the backdrop of growing social and ideological polarization, which affects all other spheres. These developments, alongside the changes brought by the pandemic, will determine the direction and intensity of the trends that impact the Jewish people in the coming months, whether in the internal Jewish arena (including Israel-Diaspora relations) or in the Jewish people's relationship with the rest of the world.

## 5

## Geopolitics



In the past year, the geopolitical arena was rife with uncertainty and posed significant challenges for decision makers. This situation has worsened since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a multi-systemic impact on the economy, security, society, culture and more. Israel will have to confront the challenges it faces with relatively limited resources in comparison to the past, due to the need to continue fighting the pandemic and the enormous burden involved in rehabilitating the economy and society. The pandemic, with its severe economic consequences, of course also harms Israel's enemies – most notably Iran – and erodes their power.

The geopolitical year covered in this report ended with the dramatic announcement (August 13, 2020) of the historic agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates to fully normalize relations. This agreement was made possible when Israel gave up its intention to annex territories in Judea and Samaria for the foreseeable future. The more Arab countries follow the path of the Emirates, the more we will see the positive consequences of the agreement for Israel's resilience and the geopolitical arena that affects the situation of Israel and the Jewish people.

## TRENDS

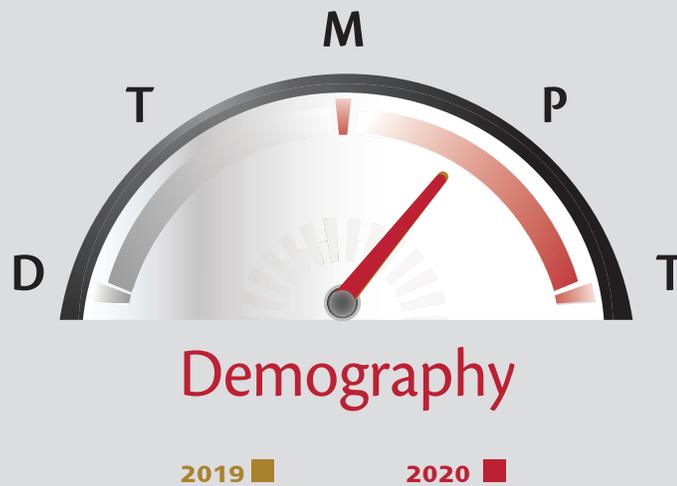
The analysis presented in this year's geopolitical survey does not ignore negative long-term trends (the lack of a solution to the Palestinian conflict, the threat of a nuclear Iran, and more). However, in light of the breakthrough achieved with the UAE, and its potential for driving a positive

regional turnaround, **we are moving the needle slightly in a positive direction.**

The full survey, *The Geopolitical Arena in the Shadow of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, can be found on pages 43-59.

## 6

## Demography



This summary of the main demographic trends last year (2019 data) is being written while the COVID-19 pandemic is still upon us, and it is still too early to assess its influence on the demographic patterns of Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. Assuming there will not be wide-scale mortality, which would affect the Jewish population's life expectancy, there will be a need in the coming months to track three main demographic metrics:

- 1. Aliyah (immigration) to Israel:** During the pandemic, Aliyah ceased almost entirely. It is likely that many expected olim (immigrants)

have only delayed their arrival in Israel and will carry out their plans later in the year. Others may postpone their Aliyah to an undetermined date or cancel it completely. At the same time, olim who arrived shortly before the epidemic's onset and who have yet to be absorbed socially and economically in Israel may, under the current conditions, prefer to return to their countries of origin, particularly if they have family there, more promising economic prospects there, and familiarity with their home country's health system.

**2. Emigration from Israel:** It is likely that the pandemic and its social implications – the unstable economic situation and concern for elderly parents, as well as what appears at the moment to be a safer medical system compared to other countries – will keep more Israelis in the country and will reduce the emigration rate. Similarly, these considerations could bring Israelis back to the country, especially those who have been overseas for a short time and who do not have families or older children. The more severe the pandemic, the longer its impact on patterns of arrival and departure of Israelis is likely to continue.

**3. Fertility:** Times of crisis and emergency situations that keep people at home for some time are likely to lead to a higher number of births nine to twelve months later. On the other hand, we have never experienced a crisis like the coronavirus. It has included extended periods of quarantine and restrictions on movement, the necessity to keep children occupied, and economic uncertainty including high rates of unemployment. All these can impact family planning and may actually lead to a delay in having children. In any case, at this stage our assessment is that any change in fertility levels will only be temporary.

Prior to the pandemic, and as in recent years, the world's Jewish population grew at a moderate rate of some 100,000 people last year and was estimated at 14.8 million at the beginning of 2020. This growth was mainly due

to an increase in the number of Jews in Israel – from 6.664 million at the beginning of 2019 to 6.773 million at the beginning of 2020 – and was slightly offset by a certain decline in the number of Diaspora Jews. In addition, at the beginning of this year there were 425,000 people in Israel without religion, that is immigrants eligible under the Law of Return but not Halachically Jewish. In total, the proportion of Jews to non-Jews in the State of Israel (including the Jewish settlers in the West Bank) remains stable at 79 percent versus 21 percent. The Jewish group includes those without religion, bearing in mind that they integrate socially and culturally in the majority society (without them, the proportion of Jews to non-Jews would be 74 percent versus 26 percent).

The number of Jews in the United States – the largest Jewish community outside Israel – remains stable at 5.7 million. This estimate relies to a great extent on the 2013 Pew study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, and on assessments of the demographics of US Jewry since then. At the same time, it should be noted that there are higher estimates of 6.7 or even 7 million. These estimates result from different definitions of who is a Jew, i.e. definitions that also include those who say they are partly Jewish, as well as from the use of other sources that combine several general surveys, each of which includes a small number of Jews.

The increase of the Jewish population in Israel derives mostly from natural increase; the remainder is the result of positive migration

(Aliyah). The lion's share of immigrants to Israel were from Europe (especially Russia, Ukraine, and France); smaller but significant numbers came from the United States and the United Kingdom. It should be noted that, in total, olim arrived from over 80 countries and from every continent. Fewer than half the immigrants to Israel in 2019 were Jewish (more than half were non-Jews eligible under the Law of Return).

The overall fertility rate among Jewish women in Israel increased from 3.09 in 2014 to 3.16 in 2016 and remained unchanged in 2017. The new figure for 2018 shows that fertility has risen again and stands at 3.17. In total, the global Jewish demographic system remained fairly stable last year, with no significant changes.

**Against this backdrop, the Demography gauge is unchanged.**



## 7

## Identity and Identification



Both the response of Jewish institutions to the COVID-19 crisis and the very intensity of the ideological debates between Jewish groups with competing worldviews show the vitality of Jewish identity today.

### The COVID-19 Crisis

The coronavirus pandemic that is now seriously affecting, North America, Israel, Europe, and other locations has had impacts, both positive and negative, on the expressions of Jewish identity. On the one hand, it has made some of the central

expressions of Jewish identity, like congregational prayer and life cycle events such as Bar/Bat Mitzvot practically impossible to conduct in person, given social distancing requirements. On the other hand, people who are at home or in quarantine and may be fearful or bored are exhibiting interest in online religious services, Torah classes, and webinars of Jewish interest. Jewish organizations and federations are thus starting to developing myriad programs - prayer events, lectures, classes and webinars as well as Chesed programs for the isolated, the elderly, and the vulnerable.

## The Diaspora

A number of Jewish community studies of small and mid-sized communities have been conducted in the past year and a half. It is likely that these studies, to a some extent, reflect the reality of Jewish life in small and mid-sized communities, especially in the areas that were not, in the past 100 years, big Jewish centers, such as in the West and the South. Below are some noteworthy aspects of these studies:

### Lack of Community Engagement

These community studies<sup>1</sup> describe Jews who are “minimally engaged” and those who have a “personal” pattern of Jewish engagement, (alongside Jews who are “communal” or “congregational”). Both of these types, which in Greater Denver constitute 25 percent of the population, and in Sarasota-Manatee, 61 percent have no engagement with the community, synagogues or Jewish organizations and feel disconnected from them. The “Personal” pattern (around 13 percent in Denver) consists of engaging in individual Jewish activities and less so in ritual or organizational activities. It consists of activities such as visiting Jewish websites and following news about Israel. The personal and the minimally involved (or the Occasional Jews in some studies) are the least likely to be inmarried. In Cincinnati, for example, only 20 percent of them are inmarried.

### No Denominational Affiliation

Forty-one percent of Jews in Greater Cincinnati say that they have no denominational affiliation, a number that is slightly lower than in Greater

Denver (46 percent). In the US West in general, 42 percent have no denomination.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, only 16 percent of Jewish households in Denver have someone who belongs to a synagogue. In Cincinnati, 28 percent of households have a dues-paying synagogue member. Here too, we see a tendency toward disaffiliation from traditional Jewish organizational structures. To a certain extent, those who say that they have no denomination attend “alternative” or “emergent” minyanim and congregations, some of whom declare themselves to be “post-denominational.”

### Boundary Blurring

On the home page of Lab/Shul, one of the more popular and significant “alternative” minyanim, we find the following: “Lab/Shul welcomes people of all races, religions, beliefs, gender expressions, sexual orientations, countries of origin, ages, abilities, families, and flavors with open hearts.” Similarly, in Cincinnati, 11 percent of the spouses/partners of Jews in intermarried households say that they are Jewish, even though they don’t have Jewish parents, were not raised as Jews, and have not converted. As one might expect, in a society where over half of married Jews are married to non-Jews and many Jews have non-Jewish friends, the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews is porous and blurred.

### Communal and Political Aspects

Despite the emergence of a “personal” pattern of Jewish engagement, many US Jews still see their Jewish identity as tied to social and political orientations. In fact, alongside the personal

pattern of engagement we also find a “communal” pattern among Jews who are strong supporters of Jewish charities and engage in volunteering (29 percent in Denver, 10 percent in Cincinnati).

The political aspect of Jewish identity in America received much salience this past year in the race for the Democratic nomination. Two major contenders for the nomination, Michael Bloomberg and Bernie Sanders, are identified Jews. Bloomberg touted policies supportive of Israel (in line with the mainstream of Jewish life), while Sanders tended to emphasize his criticism of the country’s policies. When asked about what being Jewish meant to him, Sanders referred to the Holocaust. To him, this aspect of the Jewish experience teaches that we must always fight against racism, hatred, and discrimination of all groups.

### Israel

In Israel, Jewish identity has been especially linked to politics this past year. The most salient development occurred in the campaign before the September 2019 elections. In that campaign, Avigdor Lieberman, the head of the Israel Beitenu Party, called for a secular national unity government without the religious parties. In the wake of this call, his party platform along with that of Blue and White advocated legislation allowing for a more “liberal” or secular public sphere, such as allowing certain forms of public transportation on Shabbat. They also advocated imposing civic norms in a more uniform way, including legislation designed to increase Haredi IDF enlistment and mandating a core curriculum (including English and mathematics) for Haredi schools.

Partially in response to this initiative, the right wing-religious bloc led by Prime Minister Netanyahu solidified and seemed to achieve a significant measure of ideological coherence. The religious parties, including the Haredim, supported the right wing nationalist agenda and Likud supported the idea of a traditionally Jewish public sphere. In so doing, the right wing bloc was able to act politically as one unified body.

### Europe and Latin America

Many European Jews are responding to increased aggressive anti-Semitism in one of two ways: 1) By concealing or playing down their Jewish identity. According to a 2019 FRA report, 71 percent hide, at least occasionally, their Jewishness; 2) Retreating inward and increasing Jewish observance and affiliation. The latter is hard to measure statistically but it is reflected in the increase of a flourishing of institutions and businesses that service the Orthodox Jewish community – synagogues, yeshivas and kosher restaurants (there are 300 Kosher restaurants in the Paris area.) In certain Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, we see a barbell phenomenon: relatively high intermarriage rates (25-40 percent) together with increased Haredization (carried out by Chabad, Aish HaTorah, and Shas).<sup>3</sup>

**Despite data attesting to a weakness of expression of Jewish identity in some Diaspora populations, we are leaving the Identity and Identification gauge unchanged.**

Endnotes:

- 1 The studies were conducted by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University.
- 2 According to the Pew study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (2013), 30% of American Jews identified as having no denomination. In this study, this self-identification was very prominent (41%) in the younger age groups (18-29). In the 2019 community studies it was much more prominent in the 35-54 age group.
- 3 Jewish People Policy Institute, *2018 Annual Assessment*, p. 154-155.

## 8

## Community Bonds



A global health emergency alongside political arenas in crisis (in Israel) and uproar in the United States provided the main backdrop in considering bonds between and within Jewish communities. The significant noise from these arenas drowns out, to a great extent, any other arena. The health crisis is leading to substantial change in Jewish rituals (Seder night, synagogues, Mimouna, Yom Haatzmaut), to the cancellation or postponement of trips and visits (tourism, plans to travel to Israel, student exchanges) and the shift of the bulk of Jewish activities – including those expressing relationships between communities – to the digital arena.

The following are among the key events affecting community bonds this year:

- A. The abrupt halt to face-to-face meetings of Jewish groups (including families, communities, organizations, emissaries, etc.) because of the coronavirus crisis. This has had an impact on the leadership and decision-making echelons but even more so on the wider Jewish public.
- B. The health and economic crises in communities around the world, some of which have required outside help (Italy).

- C. Repeated elections in Israel (April and September 2019 and March 2020) that were accompanied by tension-raising rhetoric between groups of Jews, as well as arguments over relations between Jews and non-Jews in Israel (which has also had an effect on Israel's image among the world's Jews). Ultimately, an Israeli unity government was formed, which brings together in a common coalition a clear majority of Jewish voters' representation.
- D. Continued involvement with the rise in anti-Semitism in Europe, as well as in the United States, that is showing signs that it too will increase to a new level as a result of the health crisis.
- E. The opening of the Presidential election year in the United States in which the subject of Jews and the subject of Israel are a factor because, among other reasons, of sharp differences of approach towards Israel between candidates.
- F. World Zionist Congress (WZC) elections benefited from much higher participation rates than has been usual in recent decades. These elections reflect interest among the

first circle of the Jewish people's leaders and activists in influencing the contours of Israel's character (gaps in outlook concerning Israel were a prominent issue in the WZC election campaign). Nevertheless, it should be noted that these elections attracted little to no attention in Israel and that their impact on Israel's policy is not expected to be great.

It seems that alongside some distancing factors, the sense of emergency arising from the dramatic problems caused by the coronavirus crisis (preserving community, Jewish creativity, dealing with high illness rates in certain communities, manifestations of anti-Semitism) has moved the main issues of contention among Jews to the back burner and highlighted the need for cooperation and mutual aid. Additionally, the rapid pace in which events are unfolding along with the high level of uncertainty make it difficult to identify definitively the direction of long-term trends.

**Against this backdrop, we have moved the Community Bonds gauge in a slightly negative direction.**

Dynamics	Enhancing effects on bonds	Weakening effects on bonds
The coronavirus pandemic	Pushes divisions aside. Highlights need for community and mutual aid.	Cancellation of ceremonies, events, conferences, visits and trips, and of direct and personal contact between Jews. The desire to strengthen mutual aid among Jews in different communities (including aid from Israel) has not achieved full fruition.
Israel's protracted political crisis	The formation of a unity government allows the focus to shift from political division to problem solving.	Sharpening of tensions between groups of Jews, and between Jews and non-Jews (in Israel). Reduces the capacity for substantive communication with world Jewry (political considerations overpower policy ones).
Continued manifestations of anti-Semitism	Common challenge for Jews which strengthens the need and desire for cooperation.	Among certain groups, leads to blaming the victim (with an emphasis on Israel). Arrogance towards Jews who continue living in countries with rising anti-Semitism.
The Trump peace plan/possibility of annexation in Judea and Samaria	Support of the majority of Israel's Jews for agreed-upon principles relating to the diplomatic arena.	Sharpening of the ideological differences between Jews, which may intensify if Israel takes practical steps of annexing territories and expanding settlement construction.
US elections	Prominence (at the start of the race) of Jewish candidates who stressed the success of the Jewish community in the US	Tension within the community between competing political groups, as well as between Israel and certain groups whose preferences conflict with those of the Israeli government.
Conflict over cooperation with the Arab list in forming a coalition in Israel	The conflict was a platform for an important debate about the significance of Israel as Jewish state and about correct conditions for it to exist as such.	Opposing ideological views led to a harsh confrontation in which charges of neglecting Zionism (from one side) and of neglecting democratic values (from another side) were raised.
World Zionist Congress elections	Strengthened interest in Zionism and Israel; aroused involvement and participation of activists.	Sharpened ideological tensions due, among other reasons, to results that highlighted and strengthened parties representing groups that are a minority in the Diaspora (esp. Haredim).



## 9

## Material Resources



The most salient event affecting the economy and material well-being of the Jewish people going forward will be the COVID-19 pandemic.

The extensive shutdowns affecting the world's leading economies, beginning in March 2020, gave rise almost immediately to proposals for riding out the crisis. These are now morphing into strategies for recovery. This suggests the first important point. Unlike the short, sharp shock delivered by non-biological natural disasters, the recovery from the ravages of COVID-19 will not be a return to a "normal" implicitly assumed even in the use of the term, "recovery." After a

hurricane or flood there is reasonable assurance of a shared understanding of what the goals for recovery should be. But, a near-global lockdown means the economic landscape will have been transformed with no one knowing what the future "normal" will be.

The world, and the Jewish people, thus face a "wicked" problem. It would be hard enough to choose among alternative strategies for restoration while confronting an event of a magnitude still difficult to comprehend; but we must also do so while aiming at a moving target. There is, therefore, also a normative question:

even if we could, do we wish to restore the economic foundations of our societies exactly as they were in December 2019? The question is not an idle one. Economic freeze has brought out more clearly forces long in motion that prior JPPI annual assessments had addressed: growing inequalities in both income and wealth in the US and Israel, unequal access to opportunity, changing roles of philanthropy in supporting civil society in Israel and key institutions of Jewish identity formation in the US, among others. Whether explicit or not, active or passive, actions taken during restoration from this disaster will have a normative component (“what ought the new normal be?”) usually missing from discussion of consequences, policies and norms that follow other disasters.

There is a contrast between the economic crisis set off by COVID-19 and that of the Great Recession a dozen years past that may affect trajectories. Then, the crisis began in the financial sector leading for several years to a great loss of confidence not only in the system for financial transactions but even within the major private institutions of finance themselves. The harm to the “real” economy was collateral damage for all its severity and attendant loss. This time, it is the real economy that has been deliberately halted in an effort to combat a greater evil. The mechanism of finance is, as of this writing, intact and therefore liquidity preserved.

In times of change, it is helpful to have access to capital, vision, or, preferably, both. It is likely that Jewish households will be better placed than the average to gain benefits through their being in a

position to acquire new holdings and business assets or to just weather the storm. This stems largely from the socioeconomic positioning of most Jewish communities within their societies. They tend to possess greater wealth than average and also are represented to a larger degree in professions that will have suffered less from curtailing retail commerce. Nevertheless, the prominence of Jews among those who are able to participate profitably in post-contagion recovery may raise issues of a political or social nature beyond the realm of economics. If this is a serious concern, it may suggest a seemingly contradictory and indirect Jewish people value in having Jewish contributions being seen as prominent in non-Jewish philanthropic endeavors related to recovery. The looming deep crisis among US state and local governments required (by either law or practicalities) to balance their annual budgets may provide many opportunities for doing so – to the possible detriment of giving to traditional Jewish institutions.

Paradoxically, it is in Israel where ethnic and religious identifiers may come to play a direct role within this larger framing. Socioeconomic stratification is closely connected with divisions that in some cases have strengthened over the years – Jewish vs. Arab; Haredi vs. mainstream – and in some cases weakened (Ashkenazi vs. Mizrahi) but could become exacerbated. If transfers of wealth and changes in asset ownership result as an indirect consequence of recovery from the pandemic, these differences are likely to be brought under the spotlight even more. The result will not be to enhance the fervor

of anti-Semitism that might be the case in the Diaspora but rather to accentuate fissures of long-standing within Israel.

In the Diaspora, Jewish people institutions receive funding from the state in Europe but also depend on philanthropy. In the US, the reliance on community giving is near-total. There are major donors supporting Jewish organizations but many of the most important for Jewish identity formation (synagogues, summer camps, day schools and after-school programming) largely depend upon small giving. Large-scale philanthropies' endowments may be affected by a prolonged general downturn, but, again, may not be subject to the same paralysis that gripped them when the very financial system itself seemed insecure. They may even possess sufficient confidence to choose over 1-2 years to exceed the minimum drawdown of their endowments required by law to meet perceived community shortfalls. The small-scale giving upon which so much of Jewish life in America depends may be another matter. The ability to sustain prior levels of donation may be affected by the financial harm that some traditional donors in the community have suffered. On the other hand, feelings of community solidarity are often enhanced during crisis. It may well be that those who suffered little or are even net beneficiaries from the economic transition will make up a portion of any shortfall.

Here as well there is a longstanding frailty that the crisis may harden into a fault line. For the millennial generation in their 20s and early 30s, the COVID-19 crisis will be the second major

blow affecting their aspirations and future earnings. The Great Recession meant that for many young adults, reduced opportunity at the onset would mean that lifetime earnings would be lowered. Depending on outcomes, the current crisis may further limit wealth gathering among those who, compared to the older generation, are already as a group less affiliated with or connected to Jewish institutions and Israel. This could have long-lasting implications for the financial well-being of Jewish community institutions.

During the first weeks of the pandemic, more than a few observers predicted that the crisis will be a turning point for globalization and its role in the future. This raises a potentially threatening prospect for Israel, as few countries have benefited as much from the phenomena associated with globalization. A new turn toward autarky and self-reliance would be a considerable blow to the world's largest Jewish community.

Two factors may mitigate any effect on Israel. The first is that Israel can take active measures. If there is to be a rearrangement of trade patterns, the country is not without recourse. Partially as a result of its lack of immediate trading partners on its borders, Israel's exports tend to be more of the high-end rather than bulk-commodity variety. It can work actively to place itself within some of the new supply chains that form around goods and services it already produces. Countries may seek greater self-reliance, but as a practical matter many countries will need to look toward regional trade to create supply chain assurance and redundancies.

## TRENDS

The second is that the movement toward self-reliance may be self-mitigating in itself. The chances of a large-scale revision in patterns of manufacturing and trade appear less likely than they may at first appear. When it comes to Israel, many of its highest value exports are in services and other relatively insulated product markets.

The global knowledge market, of which Israel has become an important supply node for scientific findings, innovation and high tech, is likely to be shaken but not drastically changed by recent events.

**Against this backdrop, we have moved the Material Resources gauge in a negative direction.**

# IN-DEPTH ANALYSES

# 10

## The Geopolitical Arena in the Shadow of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The geopolitical year to which this review refers ended with the dramatic public announcement (August, 13, 2020) of Israel's agreement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to normalize relations in exchange for the suspension of Israel's plan to annex territories in Judea and Samaria. As more Arab countries follow the path paved by the Emirates, the positive impact of the agreement on Israel's resilience and the geopolitical arena affecting the situation of Israel and the Jewish people will intensify. This arena was rife with challenges and uncertainty even before the COVID-19 crisis erupted. The pandemic carries multi-systemic impacts (spanning the health, economic, social, cultural, and security spheres), and has intensified pre-existing uncertainties. Due to the damage wrought by the coronavirus, Israel will have to contend with the challenges it poses with fewer resources than it once possessed.

Current geopolitical challenges arise from a number of flashpoints, and have the potential for violent escalation vis-à-vis Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Judea-Samaria. To this one may add a number of destabilizing global developments:

the erosion of the liberal-democratic ethos, the relative rise in power of autocratic China and Russia, and dwindling American interest in world leadership and Mideast involvement. The special US-Israel relationship, a key element of Israel's strength, is becoming a more intricate challenge to maintain, due to the difficulty of sustaining bipartisan support for Israel, and reservations on the part of broad swaths of American Jewry regarding major elements of Israeli policy. This tension is eroding the strategic Jerusalem-Washington-US Jewry triangular relationship.

Amid these dark clouds, and despite the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences (Israel's GDP for 2020 is expected to contract by 7 percent), we can still see bright spots, chief among them is the historic agreement to normalize relations between Israel and the UAE. Israel is militarily strong and free of the threat of regular armies stationed at its borders; its relations with the White House are robust; the fabric of its regional and international relationships is strengthening; it is economically and technologically strong and possesses gas

reserves in the Mediterranean that have made it an energy exporter (this year Israel began exporting gas from the Leviathan field to Jordan and Egypt) have enabled Israel to become a party to strategic regional alliances; and is poised to improve its status vis-à-vis Europe and an array of other entities. In 2019 – before the coronavirus outbreak and the tourism freeze – Israel reached a peak of 4.55 million visitors. This level of tourism is economically and politically significant, and a testament to Israel’s potential for prosperity.

The geopolitical picture, as it relates to Israel, is made up of several interacting circles: A. The international system (with an emphasis on the status and performance of the US); B. Regional threats and opportunities; C. The Palestinian situation as a whole; D. The strategic Jerusalem-Washington-US Jewry triangle. These circles have a major impact on the resilience of Israel and the Jewish people, and are the focus of this survey.

## The International System

The coronavirus pandemic erupted in a world characterized by systemic “dis-order”: an eroding Western-liberal ethos, a rise in the relative power of autocratic China and Russia, a growing awareness of the negative consequences of globalization, a waning American inclination for world leadership, and a continuous weakening of the European Union. The lack of cooperation between the leaders of the great powers is eroding the effectiveness of international

institutions. Against this background, the pandemic has evinced, since its earliest stages, an “every country for itself” posture, both in the healthcare sphere and in coping with the pandemic-driven economic crisis. At the same time, the sense that the world is on a positive trajectory – toward the reality of freedom, prosperity, social security, equal rights, and tolerance – has continued to falter.

The past decade witnessed numerous failures and disappointments: the 2008 financial crisis; growing economic inequality; the ebbing of hopes raised by the Arab Spring; terrorist attacks; migration waves; diminished governmental capacity for coping with challenges and retaining public confidence; the identity and economic crises afflicting Europe (the Brexit decision was reinforced in late 2019 by Boris Johnson’s electoral victory); US failures in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; Russian and Chinese aggression on the international stage; the problematic Iran nuclear deal and America’s withdrawal from it; the North Korean nuclear threat; international impotence in the face of the Syrian tragedy and the humanitarian disaster in Yemen; and more. According to Freedom House, 2019 was the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of declining freedom worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Based both on historical experience and on what current data suggest, a large proportion of these developments could potentially have a negative effect on attitudes toward the Jewish people, and anti-Semitism.

**The US:** In keeping with his “America First” slogan, US President Donald Trump exhibits no interest in maintaining US stature as a world leader promoting democracy and human rights. He takes an unsentimental approach to the Western allies of the US, which he feels have taken advantage of American generosity, and should bear the cost of their own defense. Europe is unenthusiastic about President Trump’s conduct and is not rushing to join the American front vis-à-vis China, or to participate in sanctions against Iran.

Trump has little interest in fostering international institutions or international agreements. He abandoned the Paris Agreement on climate change (2019) and, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, announced the termination of US funding for the World Health Organization (WHO). Trump wants to reduce the American military presence beyond US borders. Accordingly, an agreement was signed with the Taliban (February 2020) aimed at withdrawing US forces from Afghanistan. Trump has also withdrawn from the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) originally signed with the Soviet Union in 1987. He opposes the UN-sponsored Global Compact for Migration, has cast doubt on US commitment to the NATO alliance, and has entered into a trade war with Beijing (with ups and downs: the two countries’ mutual interest in averting a crisis that would hurt both sides pushes them into interim agreements that

lower the heat without solving the underlying problem of China’s behavior in the international trade arena). The pandemic has aggravated US-China conflict, with Trump claiming that China withheld critical information about COVID-19, which he calls “the Chinese virus.”

We cannot disregard the possibility of a new US administration taking office after the upcoming November elections, which would move the ideological pendulum in the opposite direction. There may be changes in both style and substance (the attitude toward international institutions and conventions, alliances such as NATO, the JCPOA, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more), but this does not necessarily signal a significant shift in US involvement in the Middle East. There is, however, relative consensus in the US with regard to China, which is seen as the fundamental threat driving US foreign policy.

**China:** Along with the Western liberal malaise, it is becoming clear that China’s growing power is the major trend of this period. China is channeling resources toward the building of a modern army; it is taking further aggressive

**We cannot disregard the possibility of a new US administration taking office after the upcoming November elections, which would move the ideological pendulum in the opposite direction.**

measures to demonstrate its supremacy in the South China Sea (where five trillion dollars' worth of merchandise is transported annually), and has not hesitated to impose its authority (belligerently) over Hong Kong, or to enter into confrontation with India. China offers an alternative political model to that of the West: rapid and steady economic development without a democratic system of government or respect for human rights, with the ruler's legitimacy springing not from the voting booth but from his effectiveness and demonstrable achievement. As the US retreats from its commitments to the UN and other international organizations, China seems to be trying to fill the vacuum by expanding its international presence. In 2000, China contributed one percent of the UN budget, but its current share is 12 percent. This past year China surpassed the US in the number of its diplomatic missions around the world (276 to 273). China's impressive economic growth has been proceeding apace for 40 years, and the country is working to ensure long-term markets for its products, and its ability to provide itself with energy, food, and minerals it requires. China's Belt and Road Initiative is meant to connect it with Europe and Asia, encompassing a gigantic market of 4.4 billion people in 26 countries. The US is suspicious of the project and views it as a means of expanding China's influence worldwide, by enlarging the circle of countries in debt to China and from which China will be able to exact future concessions.

The coronavirus pandemic and its associated economic damage could potentially throw a wrench into China's plans. Projects meant to harness the country's excess capacity could be delayed or even cancelled, the capital invested in them never to return. A prolonged decline in the growth rate would raise questions about the Chinese economy's future resilience. At the same time, there has been a rise in negative sentiment toward China due to its lack of transparency on the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic within its borders. (China is attempting to compensate for this by providing medical assistance to countries hit hard by COVID-19.)

The growth of China's middle class raises the possibility of civil-political pressures on the regime. The government may respond to domestic threats by restricting civil liberties, amplifying nationalist rhetoric, or even by deliberately intensifying confrontations in the international arena. Manifestations of the above could be seen this past year in its taking control of South China Sea outposts, the oppression of China's Muslim minority, and the harsh response to civil unrest in Hong Kong.

Chinese interest in the Middle East has gradually been increasing. The Middle East is the source of 40 percent of China's oil imports, and China is becoming the region's biggest investor. China is signing trade agreements with many different countries – from Oman to Morocco; it is building ports, railroads, electrical infrastructure, roads, and more. It appears that, in the coming years,

China will also be increasing its arms sales in the Middle East. Beijing and Tehran are moving ahead with a 25-year strategic economic and military cooperation agreement. Under this agreement, China will be investing 400 billion dollars in Iran and will in turn be supplied with discounted oil. This agreement (if it does materialize) may give Iran a strategic refuge from the American sanctions policy, and in so doing may significantly affect Israel's security. China is also expressing interest in Lebanon and Syria, whose reconstruction cries out for large-scale investment. (Russia and Iran lack the necessary resources, while the West is unwilling to collaborate with Assad.)

Israel also appears on the map of China's ambitious plans. In 2019, China was Israel's second-largest trade partner, after the US. China is involved in major Israeli infrastructure projects: the Carmel tunnels; the Tel Aviv light rail system; the expansion and operation of Haifa Port; construction of a new port in Ashdod, and more. Washington has repeatedly warned Israel (and other countries in the region) that closer relations with China could harm Israel's defense relationship with the US. And in fact, due to growing pressure by the Trump administration, Israel established (October 2019) a committee "to assess national security aspects of the foreign investment authorization process." In May 2020, it was reported that the Chinese firm Hutchison had not won the tender for construction of the Soreq-2 desalination plant, slated to be the

world's largest, due to American pressure. It was likewise reported that the US had asked Israel not to purchase 5G cellular technology from China. The US has exerted similar pressure on other countries, arguing that cellular penetration allows China to conduct espionage and could even enable it to strike an economic blow in the event of a confrontation. Israel, of course, has an interest in cultivating good relations with China, but it has to navigate carefully due to the superpower rivalry, and the need to avoid damaging its strategic relationship with the US. The COVID-19 crisis could potentially increase the pressure on Israel from both Washington and Beijing, reducing its ability to maneuver. (For more on Israel and China, see JPPI reports)

**Russia:** Moscow is taking advantage of the current American focus on domestic issues to demonstrate its military prowess in various arenas. Claiming to have doubled its military capabilities over the past eight years, Russia has proven the seriousness of its intentions, from its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and occupation of territories in eastern Ukraine, to its military involvement in Syria and the Libyan civil war. Russia has been involved in an oil price war with Saudi Arabia and the US; it is supplying S-400 aerial defense systems to Turkey; it has reached an agreement, in principle, to sell Su-35 fighter jets to Egypt; and it is building Egypt's first civilian nuclear reactor. Moscow is especially aggressive in the arms and energy markets and has displayed heightened activity in the Middle

East as it strives to project strength vis-à-vis the US and NATO (more on this below).

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Public discussion of the pandemic and its potential impact on the world order is often apocalyptic in tone, but it is necessary to exercise caution especially in relation to forecasts that are voiced unequivocally. Yet, the weighty questions raised by the crisis should not

**Public discussion of the pandemic and its potential impact on the world order is often apocalyptic in tone, but it is necessary to exercise caution especially in relation to forecasts that are voiced unequivocally.**

be ignored. How will the global economy be affected? Will the power balance be altered? Will there be open confrontation between the free world and its autocratic competitors? Should we expect social unrest, collapsed regimes,

and a growing number of “failed states”? What will the future of globalization and migration waves be? Will we witness a rise in nationalism and a growing tendency toward closed borders and autarky? And, of course: how will the crisis affect the Middle East?

The answers to these questions have implications for the fate of Israel and the Jewish people. For example, globalization and free trade are well-suited to the comparative advantages of Israel’s

export-oriented economy. A more protectionist world order could harm Israel, which currently benefits from its participation in free trade zones with the US and the European Union. Likewise, the vitality of Western Jewry owes much to the predominance of liberal-democratic values. A society that is not committed to those values will tend to manifest more hostility and anti-Semitism, and feel less obligated to protect its Jewish minority (we are already seeing a rise in anti-Semitic incidents around the world. For more on this topic, see the JPPI’s Integrated Index, p. 81) Particularly troubling in this regard is the degree to which US international status is eroding – the US is the superpower whose friendship and aid are critical to Israel, and also home to a thriving community that amounts to half of world Jewry. This trend could lead to a gradual erosion of Israeli deterrence and the strength attributed to it.

## The Middle East

**The “economic coronavirus”:** The first wave of the coronavirus pandemic exacted a heavy economic price from Middle Eastern countries: reduced oil and gas revenues; a tourism freeze; a decline in remittances from workers earning money abroad; and lower export volumes due to the global recession. This has been calamitous for a region that even before the pandemic had been economically stagnant:

- In Syria, the pandemic struck a country whose basic infrastructures had collapsed during the civil war, and which was already

sinking under the heavy burdens of American sanctions and hyperinflation. Eighty percent of Syrians live under the poverty line, 40 percent are unemployed, and many face the threat of starvation.

- The horrific explosion in the Port of Beirut (August 4, 2020) and the government's resignation in its wake, is expected to exacerbate Lebanon's twin economic and social crises. Forced to declare insolvency, Lebanon's national debt stands at over 170 percent of GDP. Citizens bereft of income and hope are demonstrating in the streets and do not shy away from blaming Hezbollah for their suffering.
- This past February, Egypt marked the birth of its 100 millionth citizen. Half the country's population subsists on incomes of less than two dollars a day. As of this writing, no agreement has been reached in negotiations over the operation of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which Egypt fears will divert water from the Nile and wreak havoc on Egyptian agriculture.
- Jordan's economy is mired in an ongoing crisis. The pandemic threatens to halt the modest growth the country had recently seen, and a 3.5 percent economic contraction is forecasted (low oil prices somewhat counterbalance the damage caused by the coronavirus).
- Yemen is in a state of humanitarian disaster. The five years of civil war put 80 percent of

the population under the poverty line. Per UN data (October 2019), children under the age of five are dying in Yemen at a rate of one every 12 minutes (due to preventable causes).

- Falling oil prices and a projected 7 percent contraction of the Saudi economy, along with a decline in American willingness to help confront the regional challenges, are pushing the Saudi crown prince to explore solutions to the fighting in Yemen, the crisis with Qatar, as well as to relations with Iran.
- Iran has been hit hard by COVID-19 and faces a severe economic crisis, exacerbated by declining oil revenues and the punishing US-led sanctions imposed on it.
- The Turkish economy, whose impressive achievements were a feather in President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's cap, is now mired in crisis – currency devaluation, a large budget deficit, high external debt, inflation, and surging unemployment rates.

The pandemic's negative economic impact may accelerate social and political trends that threaten stability in a Middle East already rife with war, terrorism, refugee waves, humanitarian crises, stagnant economies, corruption, unemployment, and failed governance systems. The required economic reform efforts foment social unrest, as they entail reduced subsidies and hurt lower-income populations. Israel needs to be prepared for the possibility that economic pressures will tempt some rulers in the region to deflect the agitation in Israel's direction.

**Direct threats:** In addition to the Iranian threat, Israel faces a potential slide into violence on one or more fronts – vis-à-vis Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and in Judea and Samaria.

**Iran:** IDF Chief of General Staff Aviv Kochavy has publicly stated (December 25, 2019) that Israel will not allow Iran to entrench itself in the northern arena in general, or in Iraq specifically: “Iran continues [...] to produce missiles that reach our territory, and has doubled the amount of enriched uranium in its possession [...] We understand that the possibility that we will reach a limited or more-than-limited confrontation with Iran is not inconceivable.” And in fact, Israel is working to thwart the entrenchment of Iran and its proxies in Syria, and to halt the delivery of strategic arms to Hezbollah. Israel does not hesitate to strike Iranian targets. A notable instance of this was the July 2, 2020 attack, attributed to Israel (and the US), on the Natanz facility where advanced enrichment centrifuges were being developed. The confrontation has also spilled over into cyberspace: on April 23, 2020 there were reports of an attempt by Iran to damage Israel’s water infrastructure; on May 9, 2020 Israel retaliated by seriously disrupting operations at the Iranian seaport at Bandar Abbas. This chain of events suggests a high likelihood of escalation, and highlights the need for Israel to be prepared for Iranian retaliation.

The American sanctions and the negative impact of COVID-19 have not, as yet, caused Iran to drop its military nuclear development efforts, or to

abandon its subversive activity in the region. Trump’s belligerent style has made it difficult for the US to garner support within the UN Security Council, which rejected the US proposal to extend the arms embargo on Iran (August 14, 2020). In response, Trump has threatened to invoke the JCPOA’s “snapback” clause to restore all sanctions against Iran, but the chances of this succeeding are not particularly high in light of the fact that the US withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018.

Iran currently possesses a stockpile of enriched uranium that could be used to produce a nuclear bomb within a few months (though intelligence sources estimate that the Natanz attack set the Iranian nuclear program back significantly). Teheran limits access to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and is developing long-range ballistic missiles; its progress in the latter endeavor was evident recently in the successful launch of a military satellite (April 22, 2020). Iran is signaling, through its military actions, that it will not yield to pressure. This could be seen in its cruise-missile attack on oil facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia (September 2019); in the aggressive actions against oil tankers in the Strait of Hormuz; in its threats against US warships in the Persian Gulf; in its strikes, via Shiite militias, on the US Embassy and American military targets in Iraq; and in the signing of a military cooperation agreement between Teheran and Damascus in July 2020 – an agreement intended to upgrade Syria’s air defense system.

The killing via US airstrike, of General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp's Quds Force (January 3, 2020), intensified the Washington-Teheran confrontation. The prevailing view is that Iran will wait for the results of the upcoming US elections to decide what to do next. Israel needs to be prepared for both: the possibility of US-Iran negotiations, which would have weighty implications; and the possibility of intensified Iranian military operations, to the point of full conflagration.

**Hezbollah:** The dominant organization in Lebanese politics has been reluctant to open a battlefield with Israel for more than a decade. Hezbollah's involvement in suppressing the recent protest movement sparked by Lebanon's severe economic crisis has eroded its public esteem, and the organization is increasingly perceived as an obstacle to economic recovery. This perception deepened further following the devastating explosion in the Port of Beirut. Along with being prepared for military confrontation with Hezbollah, Israel is also fighting against it in the political arena. Germany's designation (following in the UK's footsteps) of Hezbollah and its affiliates as a terrorist organization (April 30, 2020) was a recent achievement for Israel. Hezbollah possesses more than 120 thousand rockets that can reach far into Israeli territory. Iran wants to amplify this threat and is building infrastructure in Syria and subterranean plants in Lebanon for the production of precision guided missiles for Hezbollah. Israel is preparing for the possibility that, in the next confrontation,

Hezbollah will try to strike Israel's offshore gas facilities and vital infrastructure, or even infiltrate Israel and capture territory along its northern border. Despite the accepted view that Hezbollah is not ready now to risk another war with Israel, as it is still licking the wounds of its involvement in the Syrian civil war and is under heavy political and economic pressure in Lebanon, the possibility of an unplanned escalation on the northern front cannot be ruled out. Moreover, intensified Israeli-Iranian enmity could cause Teheran to push for a Hezbollah attack on Israel. (In early April 2020 Israel revealed photographic evidence that Damascus is permitting Hezbollah attempts to establish a presence on the Syrian Golan Heights.)

**Gaza:** According to IDF data, 1,295 missiles and rockets were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip in 2019. In response, the IDF struck 900 targets in Gaza. The Shin Bet has also been thwarting Hamas-initiated terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria (in 2019, 560 attacks were averted, including ten suicide attacks, four abductions, and over 300 shootings). This preemptive activity has continued in a period of relative calm in Gaza attributed to the coronavirus situation.

Hamas, which controls Gaza, is under pressure from Israel and Egypt, and faces unrest and domestic public criticism for the destruction in Gaza and for the poverty, the ongoing blockade, and the high unemployment rate suffered by Gazans. The Gazan poverty rate, according to the UN, is 38 percent; of 2.1 million residents, 1.3 million rely on food packages supplied by

aid agencies. This already-difficult situation is worsening due to the coronavirus pandemic's economic effects.

Despite international and regional awareness of the situation and its explosive potential, aid to Gaza remains limited. This is due to the aversion to investing in a "war zone," as well as the rivalry between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas and the fear that aid to Gazans will bolster Hamas's status. The PA is exerting economic pressure on Gaza, as part of its struggle against Hamas, and as a means of pressuring Israel (which fears that a humanitarian disaster would push Hamas toward confrontation).

We cannot rule out the possibility that the difficult situation in Gaza will cause Hamas to prefer a long-term ceasefire with Israel. When considering these scenarios, attention must also be paid to Islamic Jihad, which is funded by Iran and could, under Iran's direction, try to thwart attempts to reach an agreement in Gaza.

ISIS: The defeat suffered by ISIS and the killing of its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi by the US (October 27, 2019), did not eradicate the organization's ideological, social, and religious infrastructure. From time to time, ISIS demonstrates its ability to carry out terrorist attacks. An organization spokesman has even called for attacks on Jewish targets in order to halt the Trump plan (January 27, 2020).

## Regional Flashpoints

Conflict Flashpoints in the Middle East encompass myriad local, regional, and foreign actors linked by alliances, some of which are temporary. Besides the historical Sunni-Shiite tensions, there are intra-Sunni tensions: the Saudi-Egyptian axis (which fears Iranian and radical-Islamic subversion), and the Turkish-Qatari axis (which supports the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, and flirts with Iran). The regional flashpoints embody these tensions and also highlight the acceleration of strategic trends relevant to Israel. Two of the most notable trends are worth mentioning here: 1. The vacuum diminishing American dominance has left in the region is allowing the Russian superpower to become a highly influential actor in the Middle East; 2. Erdoğan is also taking advantage of this "disorder" and continuing to advance Turkey's status as a regional power undeterred from exerting itself militarily far beyond its borders.

**The Syrian arena – a reflection of Moscow's serious intentions:** After nine years of civil war, Bashar al-Assad remains in place. Russia, which has expended considerable energies to keep his regime from toppling, is exacting a price. Moscow is strengthening its hold on Syrian naval and air bases (Tartus and Khmeimim), which reinforce its standing in the region and vis-à-vis NATO. Accordingly, Russia is now being courted by both Erdoğan and Netanyahu.

Erdoğan worries about the empowerment of the Kurds near his border, and that another wave of

Syrian refugees from the three-million-strong concentration in Idlib will flee toward the Turkish border should the fighting intensify between Assad's forces and the Idlib-based rebels. The ceasefire arrangements achieved with Moscow's involvement have thus far proven unstable.

Israel's efforts to frustrate Iran's plan to establish a military stronghold in Syria also depends largely on Russian approval. It seems that Israel has persuaded Moscow to recognize the logic of its military measures against Iran in Syria. However, we cannot ignore the fact that Russia is engaged in superpower competition with Israel's sole ally – the US, or that Syria has established an axis of partners hostile to Israel (Assad, Iran, Hezbollah). The deployment of Russian-made S-4000 anti-aircraft missiles in Syria, and Moscow's warnings to Israel not to attack the Syrian army, indicates that Israel must continue to exercise caution in protecting its interests while avoiding friction with Moscow.

**Turkey as a regional power:** Erdoğan aspires to establish Turkey as a regional power and ideological leader in the Islamic world. This can be seen in Ankara's aggressive involvement in conflict hotspots across the Middle East, and its complete abandonment of the "zero problems" foreign policy Erdoğan so proudly espoused when he first came to power. Erdoğan does not hesitate to deploy his army, which has demonstrated the capacity to operate simultaneously on multiple fronts. He invaded Syria (September 8, 2019) to strike Kurdish forces Ankara claims are terrorist

organizations, and his army has attacked, by air and land, "Kurdish terrorist targets" in northern Iraq (June 2020). The Turkish army engaged with Assad's forces as they attempted to eradicate the (Turkish-supported) rebel pockets in Idlib. At the same time, Erdoğan has been playing the refugee card with Europe, threatening to inundate the continent with asylum seekers if his demands are not met. These demands include financial assistance, and the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria where he could send two million Syrian refugees who have fled to his country.

Erdoğan's continued support for the Muslim Brotherhood is exacerbating conflicts with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. He has insisted on drilling for oil off the northern coast of Cyprus (occupied territory per international law) over European Union objections. He has sent forces to Libya to fight alongside the "Government of National Accord," and has signed a Maritime Boundary Treaty with it (November 27, 2019) delineating an exclusive economic zone in the Mediterranean, without considering the interests or rights of Greece, Egypt, or Cyprus, which loudly protested the development.

**Israel needs to be prepared for both the possibility of US Iran negotiations, which would have weighty implications, and the possibility of intensified Iranian military operations, to the point of full conflagration.**

Turkish military involvement halted the advancement of the “Libyan National Army,” commanded by Khalifa Haftar. Egypt views this Turkish involvement, and the victory of the Government of National Accord (which supports the Muslim Brotherhood), as a threat to its security, and has warned that it will send its own forces to Libya. Thus, the tension between Cairo and Ankara is worsening, and could potentially escalate into open military conflict.

The Turkish army has also flexed its muscles in the Mediterranean Sea via naval and air force exercises, with the aim of enhancing Turkey’s regional status. Ankara’s goal is to secure a share of the regional oil and gas reserves, to redress its exclusion from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (Greece, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus), and to prevent the laying of gas supply pipelines to Europe that would bypass Turkey and run counter to Turkish interests (as with the EastMed project recently approved by the Israeli government).

Nor has Erdoğan avoided confrontation in the global arena. Turkish-American relations have had ups and downs. Ankara is maneuvering between the West and Russia, and is threatening to leave NATO. The purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia, which is antithetical to the logic of Turkey’s NATO membership, has drawn anger from Washington (but gives Ankara an advantage in possible future confrontations in the Mediterranean). Turkey is efficiently manufacturing and operating UAVs, and this year it will complete the production of a light aircraft carrier. Erdoğan is also claiming

that his country has the right to develop nuclear weapons, just like other nations.<sup>2</sup>

Erdoğan boasts that, within three years, his country will be “unstoppable” in the region. The Hagia Sophia’s transformation from a museum into a mosque (July 10, 2020) is more proof of his Islamist pretensions and neo-Ottoman ambitions. Relatedly, Erdoğan has announced his commitment to liberating the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The activity of Turkish aid organizations in East Jerusalem has raised ire in Israel, a regular target of hostile rhetoric on the part of Erdoğan and his associates. In December 2019 there were reports of an incident in which the Turkish navy ordered an Israeli research vessel to leave Cypriot waters, claiming that the area was within Turkey’s exclusive economic zone.

Turkey’s involvement in the eastern Mediterranean, and its aid to Hamas, create potential for increased friction with Israel, which needs to carefully monitor the development of Ankara’s appetite for regional dominance.

**Converging interests – opportunities:** Israel’s power and advanced capabilities, the Iranian threat, Islamic terrorism, and the challenge of exploiting and protecting the eastern Mediterranean gas reserves, have led to a convergence of interests between Israel and the major Sunni states, and to growing security cooperation between them. The most significant manifestation of this was Israel’s historic agreement with the United Arab Emirates for normalization of relations

in exchange for suspending Israel's plans to annex territories in Judea and Samaria. As more Arab states follow the path paved by the Emirates, the strategic and historical significance of the agreement will intensify. Indeed, there is a concerted effort underway to utilize the political momentum created by the normalization agreement to include more Arab countries in the reconciliation process with Israel. (The effort is currently focused on Bahrain, Oman, Morocco, and Sudan.)

### **The Palestinian Arena**

The months prior to the coronavirus pandemic were filled with developments attesting to the Palestinian Authority's instability: cuts in US aid, donor fatigue, fewer resources available to the agencies that assist the Palestinians (especially UNRWA, which the US has stopped funding). The intra-Palestinian rift has entered its 13th year with no resolution in sight. Besides all this, there is growing internal restlessness over the possibility of a change of leadership. During his years in office, Abu Mazen ensured security cooperation with Israel and relative calm in Judea and Samaria. When he steps down, a succession conflict may ensue, and coordination could be compromised.

Many Palestinians view their leaders, in the West Bank and in Gaza, as corrupt. PA Chairman Abu Mazen's occasional rejection of Israeli tax transfers as a protest measure hurts his people: tens of thousands of PA employees

see their salaries slashed, or not paid at all. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the Palestinian economic crisis. The unemployment rate in Judea and Samaria has risen from 17 to 35 percent, and in Gaza from 45 to 52 percent (the figures are even worse for the younger generation). At first, the pandemic spurred Israeli-Palestinian cooperation (Israel and the PA set up a joint operations room to fight the virus, despite the fact that some PA officials and media outlets were trafficking conspiracy theories that Israel was deliberately spreading contagion among Palestinians).

Publication of the US "deal of the century" (January 28, 2020), which the Palestinians saw as completely biased in Israel's favor, and Israel's announcements regarding unilateral annexation of territories in Judea-Samaria, added a political crisis to the economic and health crises. Hamas called annexation a "declaration of war," while on May 19, 2020 Abu Mazen declared the PA to be no longer bound by agreements with Israel or the US, including those relating to security cooperation. A Khalil Shikaki poll (June 2020)<sup>3</sup> found that 52 percent of Palestinians would support a return to armed struggle against Israel in response to an annexation move.

The Trump plan is based on the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state in 70 percent of Judea and Samaria, the Gaza Strip, and in Israeli areas adjacent to Gaza, which Israel would cede as part of a territorial exchange deal (amounting to around half the territory

that Israel would be annexing in Judea-Samaria). A transportation link would be built to connect the two parts of the Palestinian state. According to the plan, no one would be evacuated from their home, and Israel would annex 30 percent of the territory in Judea and Samaria (the Jordan Valley, settlement blocs, and access roads to sovereign enclaves surrounding any settlement located deep within Palestinian territory). The entire city of Jerusalem would remain under Israeli

**As more Arab countries follow the path paved by the Emirates, the positive impact of the agreement on Israel's resilience and the geopolitical arena affecting the situation of Israel and the Jewish people will intensify.**

sovereignty, and the Palestinian capital would be Abu Dis, beyond the security fence. Israel would be responsible for security throughout the territory west of the Jordan. As a condition of the establishment of their state, the Palestinians are expected to disarm Hamas, relinquish the "right of return," and recognize Israel as a Jewish state. In order for negotiations to be conducted, Israel would have to freeze construction for four years in areas intended for the future Palestinian state. Abu Mazen persisted in his refusal to discuss the plan, despite presidential adviser Jared Kushner's assurance (February 2, 2020) that if there are things the Palestinians "want to change, if they don't like where [the US] drew the lines, they should come and

[indicate] where they want to draw the lines."

Prime Minister Netanyahu made it clear that, in the absence of a Palestinian partner to implement the Trump plan, Israel would not pass up such a historic opportunity under the administration of so pro-Israel an American president, and would move to determine its eastern border. The more serious Israel's annexation intentions appeared, the louder the regional and international voices opposing those intentions grew. Some annexation critics even warned of punitive measures: immediate recognition of a sovereign Palestinian state, curtailment political relations with Israel, economic sanctions, abrogation of R&D agreements with Europe; cessation of Qatari financial assistance in Gaza, and more. Expressions of opposition to unilateral annexation were heard from Europe, Russia, Arab countries, the Pope, the US Democratic Party and its presidential candidate, Joe Biden, and more. Annexation was framed as a violation of international law which, as such, would destroy any chance of reaching an agreement based on the two-state principle. The United Arab Emirates ambassador to Washington, Yousef Al Otaiba, chose to address the Israeli public directly in an article in *Yedioth Ahronoth* (June 12, 2020), in which he cautioned that "annexation will certainly and immediately upend all Israeli aspirations for improved security, economic, and cultural ties with the Arab world, and with the United Arab Emirates."

The King of Jordan was especially blunt in his warning (May 15, 2020) that Israeli annexation

of portions of the West Bank would lead to “a massive conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.”

The normalization agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates struck Israel’s annexation of territories in Judea and Samaria from the agenda, and with it the related protests and retaliatory threats.

### **The Jerusalem-Washington-US Jewry Triangle**

The declining US interest in leading the world order could cause a gradual erosion of Israel’s deterrence and perceived power, which are largely based on the American superpower’s friendship and aid. The isolationist trend could also threaten US annual aid to Israel and undermine American understanding and acceptance of Israeli actions that could be seen as opposed to US interests, such as Israel’s burgeoning economic relations with China. In this regard, it is instructive to note how the current administration acknowledges the importance of the Jewish side of the “triangle.” In a June 15, 2020 address during American Jewish Committee’s (AJC) Virtual Global Forum, Secretary of State Pompeo said, “We all must be alert to the Chinese Communist Party’s threat to our way of life. Standing against bad actors is at the core of America’s values. Both of our nations are rooted in respect for God-given rights, individual freedom and human equality.”<sup>4</sup>

The deepening ideological polarization in the United States, and Israel’s transformation into a

partisan issue, have also harmed the triangular relationship. Wide dissemination and reiteration of Trump’s statement that Jews who don’t vote for his party “don’t love Israel enough,” makes it hard to sustain bipartisan support for Israel. The challenge is exacerbated by the fact that broad swaths of US Jewry are hostile to Trump and vote Democratic, while a large majority of Israelis are hoping for a Trump victory in the upcoming elections. Israeli support for Trump stems from an array of meaningful pro-Israel actions credited to the current president: the US Embassy move to Jerusalem, recognition of Israeli sovereignty in the Golan Heights, overall acceptance of Netanyahu’s views on an agreement with the Palestinians, and a record of resolutely standing by Israel in the international arena – as on the issue of the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) possible investigation of claims that Israel committed war crimes against the Palestinians in Judea-Samaria and Gaza. (The Court has yet to make an initial finding on the issue’s judicial merit.) Trump has bluntly attacked the ICC’s proceedings against the US and Israel, and has even signed an executive order sanctioning ICC staff (June 11, 2020).

The polarization of the two main US political parties over Israeli policy is not limited to the election campaign alone. A Gallup poll (April 2020)<sup>5</sup> found that, while the American public has greater sympathy for Israel than for the Palestinians on issues related to the conflict, the percentage of those favoring Israel is much higher among Republicans (91 versus 67 percent among Democrats). And in fact, when the

House of Representatives passed a resolution (December 6, 2019) supporting a two-state solution and cautioning Israel about annexation, most Democrats voted for the measure and most Republicans voted against it. In another emblematic split (June 2020) Democratic House members signed a letter opposing annexation, while House Republicans signed a letter in favor. The Black Lives Matter demonstrations that followed the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, and the concomitant radicalization of American political discourse, are reinforcing a tendency within the Democratic Party's progressive wing to equate the plights of American Blacks and the Palestinians. The annexation that was planned in Judea and Samaria could have strengthened the trend of portraying Israel as a racist state.

In a polarized US reality, Israel faces a growing temptation to seek immediate-term benefits from the supportive (Republican) side, while ignoring the possible longer-term price (unqualified support for Trump bears a cost, if only because he is loathed in Europe). This temptation is exacerbated by the fact that some of the Democratic presidential hopefuls did not hesitate to criticize Israeli policy: not only have intentions been voiced of cancelling the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, but there have been threats of cutting American aid to Israel should the latter take annexation measures.

This situation, in which attitudes toward Israel are becoming increasingly partisan, poses a major challenge for what has always been the strategic goal of Israeli governments: to maintain bipartisan

US support, and to maintain the support and solidarity of American Jewry as a whole (most US Jews vote Democrat). Weakened intra-Jewish solidarity could make it more difficult to unify forces and mobilize to help Israel in an hour of need.

## Conclusion

The light and shadows of the strategic picture show that Israel's strength does not guarantee the resolution of its fundamental strategic problems it faces. Chronic Mideast instability makes it necessary to prepare for violent flare-ups even when the involved parties would seem to have no interest in escalation. Israel must navigate its way in the face of significant security threats, chief among them Iran's regional subversion and its desire to acquire nuclear weapons. The normalization agreement with the United Arab Emirates marks a significant breakthrough in Israel's relations with the Arab world and has the potential to encourage other Arab countries to join the circle of peace. However, this welcome achievement does not free Israel from the political, security, demographic, and moral challenges posed by the lack of a solution to the Palestinian issue.

Due to the damage wrought by the novel coronavirus, and the burden of economic and social recovery, Israel will now be forced to address these challenges with fewer resources than in the past. Under these demanding circumstances, it will become more necessary than ever to set priorities with care. The decision-makers of Israel and world Jewry will need to proceed with greater caution, especially regarding decisions with the potential to

erode solidarity, which, in the pandemic's wake, has become so much more important.

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy>
- 2 Newsweek Sept 4, 2019
- 3 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, June 17-20, 2020
- 4 The Times of Israel, June 15, 2020
- 5 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/293114/majority-again-support-palestinian-statehood.aspx>

# 11

## The COVID-19 Crisis and the Jewish People: Implications, Dilemmas, and Recommendations

- The Jewish world's decision makers are being required to make decisions with long-term significance at a **time of uncertainty that demands flexibility**.
- **Signs of change in the world order pose a challenge to the Jewish people:** Globalization has been beneficial for the Israeli economy. The prosperity of Western Jewry rests on the values of the liberal-democratic system.
- **The crisis intensifies the need for public trust in government** to facilitate maximum cooperation in navigating an exit from it.
- The health crisis presents an **opportunity to encourage Aliyah** to Israel.
- Diaspora communities must ensure that there are adequate **resources to maintain Jewish institutions, assist Jews in distress, invest in activities with the potential for future growth, and assist the general community**.
- Jewish communities should **prepare for a period of significantly heightened anti-Semitism**. This preparation should include, among others, proactive defense, coalitions, lobbying, and tools for times of emergency.
- **Ties between the Haredi leadership and state authorities must be adapted** to allow for the rapid identification of crises that demand a suspension of the distrust inherent in relations between Haredi and non-Haredi sectors.
- After the crisis has passed, communities will need to strike an appropriate balance between the advantages of the **tangible-activity space** (which produces commitment) and those of the **digital-activity space** (quick connection).

## Introduction

The health, economic and governance tumult that has swept the entire world as a result of the coronavirus does not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. Most of its effects are not unique to one group or another – except when speaking of the older age cohorts. At the same time, there is reason to examine how the crisis will affect the Jewish people in its distinctive contexts – among other reasons, as an aid to policy planning at a time when the crisis is at its peak and after it ends.

We will present in brief the arenas that the crisis impacts and, following the analysis, we will lay out some main questions unique to decision makers in the Jewish people. This document will not address issues that are clearly global or medical-professional, unless they have an element that touches on the Jewish people and requires special treatment.

## Main Arenas of Impact on the Jewish People

The pandemic's short- and medium-term effects on the Jewish people relate to the following aspects:

**Change in the Global Agenda:** The impact of this change is apparent in the shift of major focal points of attention to new and urgent arenas. For example, the world is less free to deal with the Iran nuclear issue – while Iran itself is also less free to allocate resources to the struggle against Israel.

In the medium and long term, the corona pandemic is also likely to impact the domestic political arena in many countries, as well as the global balance of power. Countries that deal with the crisis effectively will recover quickly and strengthen compared to other countries likely to weaken as a result of the consequences of their flawed response. For the long term, we must include in the impact ecosystem the possibility that the crisis will strengthen nationalist and isolationist trends and damage globalization processes and international cooperation.

**The Power of the State of Israel:** Israel has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis in terms of its political and economic stability, the robustness of its health, and its public cohesion. It should be noted that Israel embarked on its response to the crisis while enmeshed in a political crisis that lasted more than a year. This latter crisis did not stop the process of decision making within either the political-governmental or the professional-bureaucratic echelons, but it does require the incoming government to make especially painful decisions. The resolution of the political crisis and the establishment of an emergency unity government with a parliamentary majority will confer greater legitimacy to these difficult determinations. Israel is still in a deep economic crisis; the road to recovery will be long, not least because recovery entails parallel progress in dealing with the coronavirus and its global economic impacts.

**The Strength of Jewish Communities:** The crisis has disrupted Jewish communities both economically and in terms of their ability to hold regular activities. In some communities, mainly Haredi, the virus wreaked a heavy toll on human life. According to preliminary estimates, the proportion of Jews – those infected and those who have died – is much higher than their population share in their countries of residence (except Israel). The accompanying economic crisis has reduced community resources and diminished the strength of organizations (synagogues, clubs, *chavurot*, etc.), and has forced communities to redirect resources according to new priorities. This reduction, whose extent is difficult to estimate at this early stage, has come at a time of almost complete cessation of traditional gatherings and communal activities. Only the online Jewish arena has continued to operate and has even expanded rapidly. This requires communities to re-gear along these lines with creativity and innovation.

**Changes in Activity Patterns:** In addition, a marked change is evident in the traditional activities of Jewish engagement as expressions of identity and community belonging. This change affects communal religious gatherings (synagogues) as well as those for cultural purposes (study, social activities). In certain communities, mainly among the Orthodox, this has brought significant hardships, whether in getting their members accustomed to observing

harsh regulations or in finding reasonable solutions to unfamiliar problems (including Halachic issues). These hardships have accelerated initiatives to expand digital Jewish engagement and have sparked internal debate processes over the need to adapt to a new reality (the debate over Zoom Passover Seders was a clear example of this).

**Relations Between Jewish Communities:**

Diaspora - Israel relations, as well as the ties of mutual responsibility common to all the world's Jews, also face a new challenge. At first, this manifested on the technical level: prohibitions on travel and meetings; a halt of tourism; the cancellation of plans to visit or study in Israel; the recall of Israeli *shlichim* (emissaries) serving in the Diaspora, the cancellation of the March of the Living in Poland. Many of these activities have moved to the virtual arena, whose experiential power is different from that of the physical. Also affecting these relations is a refocusing of attention on one's immediate surroundings, with pressing concern for the family's health and employment situation. That is, Jews (like the rest of the world) are consciously busy handling immediate and urgent problems and are less available for their ties with distant communities. At the same time, many Jews who have been sitting at home found that having nothing (professional) to do freed up time for them to communicate with other Jews, to study and read, and for exposure to Jewish content and culture.

**Attitudes toward Jews:** Historical experience teaches that political crises often lead to the spread of anti-Jewish propaganda. The COVID-19 crisis has also unleashed outbursts of anti-Semitic propaganda among certain groups, although at this stage it is too early to state that the crisis has caused serious damage to the Jews' image and security. Continuing the trend observed even before the pandemic, reports of anti-Semitic incidents are increasing not only in Europe but also in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The ADL's annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, released in May 2020, found that in 2019, American Jews were subjected to more anti-Semitic incidents than in any year of the last four decades.<sup>2</sup> ADL leaders said that this essentially reflects the "normalization of antisemitism" in the United States. This was the situation even before the health and subsequent economic crisis, which is liable – as social crises do – to lead to a strengthening of radical groups, including those that harass Jews.

## Dilemmas for Decision Makers in Israel and the Diaspora at a Time of Uncertainty

Leaders and heads of organizations throughout the Jewish world are required to make decisions with likely long term significance in a period when uncertainty is a major factor that demands flexibility and the capacity to change direction on the go. In the following paragraphs, we describe a series of areas in which questions influenced by

the corona crisis are likely to arise in the medium and long term and how to deal with them. Of course, in this context, we relate only to matters that have an explicit connection to Jewish people issues.

Geopolitical developments, global and regional, are discussed in a different chapter (p. 43).

## Economic Priorities

The Jewish people and its institutions are rich in resources, though these of course are not unlimited. In normal times, too, there is a constant "tug of war" out of the desire to advance different, sometimes competing agendas. In times of emergency, when the routine is broken, renewed thought is required about the priorities of the Jewish people as a whole, of its organizations and institutions, and of the funders that drive its activity. The crisis provides an opportunity to identify anew what is essential and what less essential. This reevaluation is critical in ensuring that depleted resources are not directed to areas that are not vital and allows for changes and reforms that would be more difficult to accomplish in more routine days. This chapter will cover the subject of economics only briefly, since this relates mostly to decisions taken on the explicitly professional level (deficits, interest rates, income support, etc.).

**Israel:** The allocation of economic resources occurs mainly through the government according to its priorities. In times of crisis, extra attention

should be focused on these allocations to ensure they are directed to the most urgent purposes for the short and long term. Crisis also increases the need for public trust in the government and its priorities. When the public is asked to pay a price (in unemployment, taxation, cuts in assistance, etc.), its cooperation is conditioned, among other things, on accepting that the price is essential, and on the recognition that the required price results from constraints that are acceptable to all. The manner in which the current governing coalition was established, as well as its unprecedented size, has certainly eroded to some extent the required public trust in the efficiency of government institutions. But after more than a year of political crisis, the creation of the emergency unity government was also received with a degree of relief that balanced out the picture. In the end, the real test will be how effectively the institutions, ministries, and other bodies working on the government's behalf function, and the results they achieve.

According to these principles, Israel must also assist all the world's Jews. This assistance should be directed toward critical needs that can be explained to a public forced to pay the price (more on this below).

**Diaspora:** Organized Diaspora communities have **four main goals** in setting budgetary priorities in this time of crisis: 1. To ensure that the community has the **resources to maintain its main institutions** so that they are able to recover after the crisis. 2. To **aid Jews in distress** within

the community, be they individuals or groups (e.g., retirement homes). 3. To invest in activities arising from the crisis that have **potential for future growth** (e.g., Judaism online). 4. To join, in the name of the Jewish community, in **assisting the general community**, whether for reasons of essence (Jewish values) or of image (to boost Jewish visibility as a force for good). This is the time to utilize cash reserves and community funds designated for emergencies.

To achieve these four goals and to safeguard the community's future, the crisis should also be seen as an opportunity to refresh budget priorities, and to reevaluate institutions and organizations, the need for them and the significance of their activities. It is appropriate to ensure – even more than in normal times – that the natural impulse to protect the status quo, even when it has become outmoded and superfluous, does not deplete the community's resources and leave it without sufficient means to maintain relevant future-securing activities. The move hinted at by the president of the Reform Movement, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, for an administrative union of America's progressive Jewish movements (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) is an example of the kind of thinking required at such a time.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of whether such a merger occurs or not, and without going into the specific question of its desirability, there is need for cross-cutting examinations of many other institutions and organizations and for raising clear-eyed questions about them.

## Israel-Diaspora

Israel's readiness in dealing with a health crisis (or any other) is of critical importance, since it is the largest Jewish community and is under a central and elected government. In other words, if Israel does not maintain a policy that protects its citizens against pandemics, the damage to the Jewish people could be quick and dramatic. It is clear that, in this context, the coronavirus crisis sharpens the Jewish people's perpetual dilemma relating to the question of being gathered in one place, with all its benefits (shared national and cultural life in a space protected from harassment), as opposed to being scattered in different communities, whose advantages include an aspect of risk diffusion). One way or another, as the very core of the Jewish people, the State of Israel's decision makers must pay heed to a number of issues that directly affect the state's actions in the wider Jewish context during the coronavirus pandemic.

**Aliyah and Absorption:** For several reasons, the health crisis is an **opportunity for Israel to encourage Aliyah**. **First**, it is traversing the crisis relatively well, relying on a strong universal healthcare system. **Second**, it allows for the continuity of Jewish life, even when gathering in traditional Jewish institutions (synagogues) is not possible or more complicated, and it safeguards a strong Jewish identity. **Third**, it provides Jews with a space that is relatively protected from harassment by radical elements exploiting the crisis atmosphere for incitement and fostering hate.

**Fourth**, economic crises have historically been a major engine of migration. Although Israel has its own economic crisis, someone who has lost his or her financial base elsewhere may consider migrating to Israel (if only because, without the economic consideration, the other factors mentioned above come into play).

At the same time, the opportunity to increase Aliyah involves quite a few dilemmas. Israel is itself in a complex economic situation, which the extra costs of immigrant absorption would not help. Such an additional burden would not only have economic implications, but also psycho-social ones that could increase tensions between veteran Israelis and new immigrants due to competition over resource allocations. By the way, this tension existed in the past during large-scale waves of Aliyah. But, in the end, Aliyah to Israel has contributed both to Israeli society and to its economy.

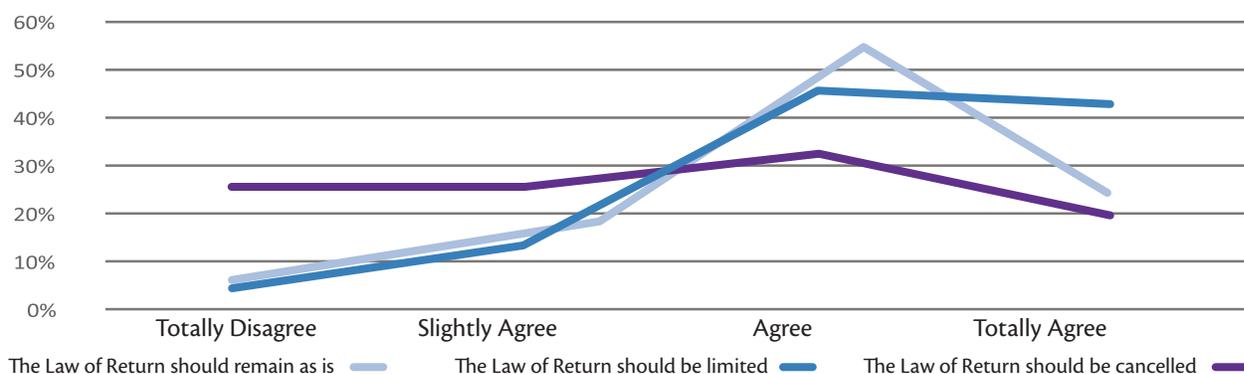
Aliyah under pandemic conditions also presents and complicates public health challenges. The desire to bring new olim must be tempered by measures to avoid importing more COVID-19. In such conditions, arguments over the immigrants' identity (their places of origin and their degree of Jewishness, etc.) are likely to intensify. According to JPPI data, a third of the Israeli Jews already support narrowing the scope of the Law of Return. This perspective is likely to increase in conditions of large-scale Aliyah at a time when absorbing immigrants (a significant

proportion of whom are eligible under the Law of Return but are not Jewish) poses a greater challenge than usual.

Israelis living abroad constitute another group that should be considered in light of the crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted Israel's effective management of the crisis compared

to other countries with large concentrations of Israelis, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This creates an opportunity to bring Israelis back to Israel. We must work to ensure re-acclimation tracks for these returnees and provide special encouragement to those whose contribution to economic growth is high.

### Agreement that "to be a good Jew is to take care of other Jews," by opinion regarding the Law of Return<sup>4</sup>



Among Jews in Israel, the more one takes into account concern for Jews in the Diaspora, the greater one's desire to limit the Law of Return (on average).

**Aid to Communities:** The COVID-19 pandemic threw some Diaspora Jewish communities into crisis or brought them to the brink of one. This occurred for several principal reasons. **First**, high infection rates and widespread fatalities; **second**, damage to community institutions and resources, which makes it difficult to continue providing services to community members; and **third**, diminished security of Jews resulting from heightened social tensions. These three crisis

factors demand that Israel determine whether and how it is able to aid communities to improve their situation and, of course, the extent to which it is obliged to do so.

There are not many options for how aid could be extended.

Allowing and even **encouraging Aliyah** is one type of aid, which to some extent offers a solution to the third problem (harassment of Jews), but

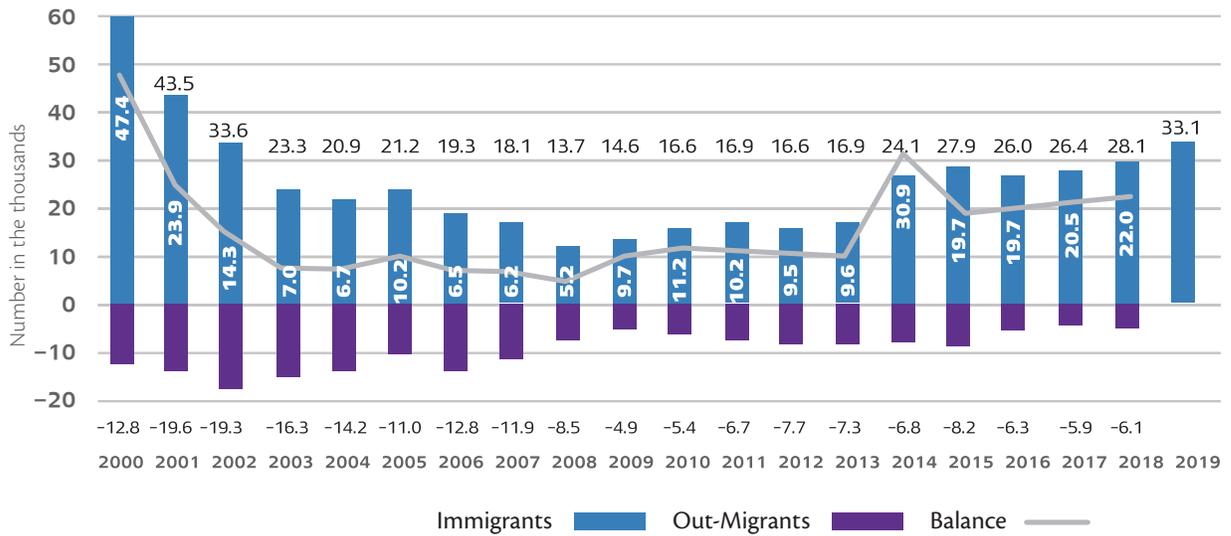
does not offer a solution to the first (health) or the second (economic). In effect, the most reasonable scenario is that encouraging Aliyah would actually cause even more economic harm to the communities, which would lose families and resources, especially if Israel prioritizes the immigration of young professionals.

**Medical aid** is a complicated matter for Israel, certainly when dealing with countries that have well-developed healthcare systems, and at a time when Israel itself is stretched to the limit ensuring that its own population's needs are met. At the same time, Israel should consider the possibility of providing such aid for two reasons and in two ways. First, symbolic aid that expresses Israel's aspiration of mutual responsibility. Second, limited emergency aid to Jewish communities in countries where healthcare systems are straining to handle the load. Such aid could take the form of advisers (physicians, social workers) or equipment (medicines, masks, etc.).

**Economic aid to communities whose resources are exhausted** is also not a simple matter. Israel, too, must deal with tough dilemmas in the area of resource allocation,

although limited amounts of financial assistance could be provided to communities that have been especially hard hit. Polling on this subject has shown that around half of Israeli Jews support aiding Diaspora communities (48 percent), although it has also found that only about a third of Israelis would donate from their own pockets to such an initiative.<sup>5</sup> It would be preferable that an economic initiative be managed as a partnership between Israel and strong Diaspora communities to aid weaker, more needy ones. If Israel wishes to take such a step, it is appropriate that it assess whether there are people within the community itself who could raise assistance funds, as well as whether its institutions are sufficiently well run to justify outside economic aid. Israel and the organized Diaspora community do not need to strive to save every Jewish institution in financial straits, but rather to ensure that resources are provided to institutions and organizations for which there is good reason to be saved and whose activities serve a clear and essential purpose. Economic crisis creates an opportunity to condition necessary financial aid on reforms whose time has come.

## Immigration, Out-Migration and the Migration Balance: Israel 2000-2019



### Relations Between Jews and Non-Jews:

The pandemic crisis is also likely to affect relations between Jews and non-Jews in various ways. Several key factors will drive these influences. **First**, social and economic crises carry a radicalization danger. Experience teaches that societies in a state of tension and polarization are often unfriendly to Jews. **Second**, because of the crisis, we are likely to see the radicalization of specific population groups that are not fans of the Jews and who are liable to exploit the pandemic to build their following. **Third**, governments in countries hit by the crisis may have difficulty directing political and economic resources to the protection of Jews. **Fourth**, perceptions of Jews as a group are likely to be influenced by the actions of individuals and groups during the pandemic, whether negatively (the Jews do not take care to

keep to the rules and harm the general population) but certainly also positively. During this period, the Jewish people can highlight its commitment to and participation in the common war of all of humanity to defeat the virus through financial donations, volunteering, technological and medical innovation, etc. **Fifth**, Israel's actions in dealing with the crisis affect how Jews are perceived worldwide. This applies to both its internal response and its external aid (as discussed, through development of inventions, technology, assistance to communities in need, etc.)

The following are several of the issues that the Jewish people's decision makers must deal with in this regard:

**Anti-Semitism:** The growing scale of anti-Semitic incidents was apparent years before the coronavirus crisis broke and had already begun

to erode the sense that had prevailed among certain Jewish groups that this phenomenon was a thing of the past. Historical experience over many years teaches that social, political, and economic crises – including those spurred by epidemics – serve as fertile ground for the spread of Jew hate. Accordingly, if the crisis continues, and the worse its social and economic outcomes are, Jewish communities must **prepare for a period of significantly elevated levels of anti-Semitism**. This preparation should include a range of instruments: proactive defense measures, coalition building with supportive groups, joint endeavors with various law-enforcement agencies, lobbying activity by organizations and individuals who are close to those in power, strengthening the sense of community partnership, contingency plans for responding to and dealing with emergencies, trauma, etc.

Israel's role in relation to this phenomenon has three critical strategic elements. **First**, it should improve its absorption capacity as a refuge for Jews in the event they are forced, or desire, to leave the countries in which they live. **Second**, it should optimize cooperation with Diaspora Jewish communities and the organizations that represent their interests. Israel must bear in mind that Diaspora Jews have a better understanding of their environments and the means at their disposal; for this reason it is best that it work in coordination with these Jews as much as possible (including, in significant cases, considering accepting a degree of damage to Israel's direct

interests to advance the war against anti-Semitism). **Third**, it should engage in covert and overt activity to protect Jewish communities by utilizing various agencies available to the state in areas such as intelligence, investigations, security, etc. Israel must also prepare for an extended period of such activity and ensure that its agencies and institutional structures are at the ready organizationally to undertake it effectively and on an ongoing basis.

**Aid to Others:** The Diaspora Jewish communities, and Israel too (perhaps, advisedly, also within a cooperative framework) must find ways **to highlight the stabilizing aid Jews provide to groups and individuals shaken by crisis**. Jews, of course, engage in supportive action all the time, through donations and volunteering, but in this time of crisis it is important to emphasize that such action is connected to the Jewish community. Action in the community's name is necessary first and foremost as a matter of principle – the calling to assist vulnerable groups and demonstrate solidarity with all humanity in a period of crisis. Such action would also improve the image of the Jewish community at a time of tension and will ease the process of finding coalition partners to counter anti-Jewish harassment.

Israel can and must find in the crisis opportunities to improve its ties with countries and groups to whom it is able to offer help.

Of course, at a time when resources are tight and needs are pressing, the question of when it

is and when it is not possible to help others should be seriously considered (“The poor of your own city come first”). It is clear, however, that sometimes reasonable aid can be given with considerable benefit over the long term. As such, decisions concerning aid to other

countries or organizations during the crisis should be handled by an integrative body such as the National Security Council, and not by those whose purviews are limited to a specific arena (Treasury, Health, Strategic Affairs, etc.).

## Anti-Semitism in Western Europe and the United States

Anti-Semitism in Western Europe and the US	Trend	US	France	UK	Germany
Hold anti-Semitic views (%) <sup>6</sup>	▼	10 (10)	17 (37) <sup>7</sup>	36 (39) <sup>8</sup>	16 (27) <sup>9</sup>
Hold anti-Semitic views, among Muslims (%) <sup>10</sup>	▲	-	49 (83)	58 (54)	70 (62)
Rise/decline in incidents (%)	▲	+12	+27	+7	+13
Violent assaults	▲	61 [39]	151 [183]	157 [124]	98 [62]
Total incidents (extreme violence, assaults, damage, desecration, threats)	▲	2,107 [1,879]	687 [541]	1,805 [1,690]	2,000 [1,770]
Rate of incidents per 1,000 Jews	▲	0.37 [0.33]	1.5 (1.2)	6.2 (5.8)	17.2 (15.3)
Anti-Semitism is a very serious or fairly serious problem (%)	▲	73 (76)	95 (86)	75 (48)	85 (40)
Considered emigrating because they do not feel safe in their countries (%)	▲		44 (46) <sup>11</sup>	29 (18)	44 (25)
Avoid places in their neighborhood because they do not feel safe there as Jews (%)	▲	8	35 (20)	68 (37)	35 (28)

Note: Numbers without parentheses are for the year 2019/2020. Numbers in square brackets are from 2018, while those in parentheses are the most recent figures available.

## The Haredim: Tested by Corona

The Haredi Orthodox may be a minority group among Jews but its significance exceeds its numerical size for several reasons: its high birthrate, profound degree of engagement in

Jewish life, unsurpassed Jewish literacy, and strong and stable relationship to Jewish tradition and the Jewish people.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis exposed weaknesses in the community’s

structure and practices.<sup>13</sup> The reason a separate section in this report is devoted to the Haredi community, in Israel and elsewhere in the world, is that they have been harmed by the pandemic at far higher rates than other communities, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Among other reasons, it was apparent that the community had difficulty in adapting to the rules of conduct required during the pandemic. Educational institutions and synagogues (mainly, but not only, in the Haredi community) shuttered late, which permitted massive infection among members of the community. Leaders, among them prominent rabbis, were slow to recognize the necessity to act according to the directives of the civil authorities. The result was a harsh blow to health (with many lives lost) and to their way of life – and also to the community's image in the eyes of Jews and non-Jews.<sup>14</sup>

This state of affairs demands that the community and its leadership reorganize, as many of them admitted after the fact (notable in this was Aryeh Deri in an interview with the newspaper, *Kikar HaShabbat*).<sup>15</sup> It also demands that the other Jewish institutions and leaders – the Israeli government and organizations in the Diaspora – reevaluate the networks of connection between the non-Orthodox and Haredi worlds. Below are several aspects that should be examined in light of the pandemic's impact on the Haredi community:

#### **Haredi Relations with Civic Leadership:**

The Haredi community excels in managing

social policy that delineates clear boundaries of conduct and community life-style, their preservation and their enforcement. The community is also adept in exercising power, particularly political-electoral power, to secure budgets and other benefits. This management has withstood claims that it contradicts the demographic, economic and security realities of the modern world. What the Haredim were asked to do in the face of the coronavirus was to forgo practices that represented a significant part of their collective identity. They were not asked to disregard Halacha, which makes it clear that saving a life supersedes all other mitzvot. And indeed, once it sank in that this was a matter of saving lives, the top rabbis called for strict compliance with government instructions. The problem was the time it took before community leaders understood that this was a case of saving life. Until that point, most assumed that the instructions were yet another assault on their collective identity and reacted as they usually do in their struggle to preserve this identity.

A central and important tenet of the Haredi-Orthodox world is separateness from the secular world. This goes to the essence of the group's educational and communal philosophy and enables Haredi Jewry to rear their children to continue along the path of the previous generation. The health crisis exposed the difficulty of discerning the urgent need to lower the fences separating the Haredi world from the secular authorities, and to accept, under exigent circumstances, directives from officials

whose priorities are totally different from those of the Haredi leadership. The difficulty in making such a sharp transition is understood. When the secular state leadership orders the yeshivot closed, the group's leaders are suspicious – with some justification – that the yeshivot are not as important to the secular as they are to the rabbinical leadership. This suspicion leads to the assumption that the order was issued lightly, with little appreciation of its consequences, and should not to be heeded without time for additional consideration. Under pandemic conditions, this extra time led to a serious infection crisis with a high incidence of disease and death.

Given the outcomes, we can state that relations between the Haredi-rabbinical leadership and the secular authorities need to be adapted to allow for rapid identification of crises that require sharp reprioritization and the suspension, at least for a while, of the inherent distrust between the Haredim and the non-Haredi world. The most suitable candidates for institutionalizing these adaptations are the Haredi sector's representatives who are part of the secular government (even if they don't always accept its ideological priorities) and enjoy the trust of the Haredi community, which is not accustomed to suspicion-free dialogue with secular institutions. These public representatives have a duty to find a way to rapidly implement emergency procedures in their community, including persuading the rabbis and spiritual leaders to act quickly according to the directives they have

received. The secular government's institutions (mainly in Israel, though there are parallels in Diaspora community institutions) would do well if they too found a way to establish a format for emergency communications with a Haredi world that is relatively isolated from them. This is true in the technical sense (how to communicate with a population that largely doesn't use televisions or smart phones) but even more so in the substantive sense (how to foster relationships of trust in times of emergency without the need for an adjustment period).

**Halacha:** Orthodox Halacha is not shaped in policy institutes or organizational institutions, but rather through an ongoing multi-voice process of rabbinical discourse. This discourse has its own rules and does not readily respond to outside pressures. That said, there is no doubt that those who run the discourse desire to maintain its relevance to the conditions in which Jews actually live. In the reality that has coalesced in recent months, these conditions include the coronavirus pandemic and its requisite "social distancing" – a means that constantly interferes with a way of life shaped by Halachic routine. From prayer *minyanim* to the learning community, from the extended family gathered for the Seder, to the congregation required for a funeral or *shiva*. The Orthodox community's Halachic and social practices were severely disrupted by the demand for social distancing and require measures anchored not only in the epidemiological discourse but also in the Halacha.

As discussed, the Halachic discourse requires safeguarding human life. But it is not always clear what precisely this entails – in which areas or for how long. As of this writing, it is uncertain when and how the crisis will end, though we should take into account the possibility that it will require lifestyle changes for a long time, perhaps permanently. It falls to the rabbis and community leaders to develop tools for dealing with changing life conditions. So it is with regard to the rules of prayer and gathering, of purity and family life, and every other element that may be required to strike a new balance between keeping Halacha as it has taken shape until now and the necessity to protect life.

**Perceptions:** The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in two outcomes vis-a-vis the image of the Haredim and Jews in general. First, relations between Haredi and non-Haredi Jews – relations that were already fraught with escalating tensions over various issues (pluralism, religion and state, attitudes toward modernity, IDF service, etc.). JPPI's annual Pluralism Index surveys attitudes toward different population groups in Israel. The Haredim consistently rank at the bottom of the ladder with respect to their "contribution to the country" (it isn't that they don't contribute but that other Israelis perceive them as not doing so). This year, their ranking was similarly low. In fact, in the weighted responses of Jews and non-Jews, the Haredi community, on average, ranked lowest of all groups measured in terms of contributions to the country. Moreover, this year it was clear that

Israel's secular population believes the Haredim enjoy preferential treatment over other groups. These and other data testify to the fact that attitudes toward Haredim took an even more negative turn during the current crisis.

On another level, the Haredi community's comportment during the COVID-19 crisis has reflected on Jews in general. Conspicuous in their dress and ways, and easily identifiable as a Jewish group, **the Haredi community's conduct has ramifications for non-Haredi Jews.** This fact was thrown into sharp relief when Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York City, criticized the behavior of "the Jewish community" following a Haredi funeral that broke the rules. His rebuke met with a sharp response from Jewish figures and organizations, Haredi and non-Haredi, which impelled the mayor to clarify his statement. It was hard, however, to shake off the impression already left: when a group whose Jewishness stands out breaks the rules, its actions affect attitudes toward Jews in general. This, of course, leads to further alienation between Jews and other Jews, but is also liable to lead to an erosion of the image of all Jews.

## Physical vs. Digital Judaism

Jewish tradition is based on gatherings of Jews for communal activities in a single space. So it is for families and friends on seder night, community prayer/worship, education in classrooms and between study partners, to give

just a few examples. COVID-19 forced Jews to curtail or cancel physical space gatherings and move instead to virtual spaces. Online activities have a number of disadvantages but also some advantages. In light of the developments in recent months during the crisis, consideration should be given to how to best design the Jewish space for the coming years and decades. Of course, the process of rethinking the balance between virtual and physical venues is not unique to the Jewish arena. It is underway in many contexts: schools and universities, the workplace, health care, sports and more. At the same time, the Jewish sphere has special characteristics, including the need for gatherings as the most appropriate way to meet with a dimension of intimacy and meaning, but also for shared rituals with tangible elements (it is impossible to taste bitter herbs from a virtual seder plate or to sit in a digital sukkah).

Based on the experience accumulated to this point, and given the possibility that digital activity will be necessary or even expand in the future, the following are among the considerations that must be borne in mind:

**Commitment and Participation:** Digital activity does not generate the same commitment as the physical space. It is easy to connect and easy to disconnect, the cost in time and money is low, the investment of time and money is felt less. These two facts are, of course, two sides of the same coin. Gatherings in physical space are harder to organize but produce a greater sense of community. Gatherings in the digital

space are easier to organize but produce fairly loose connections. Translating this to the Jewish world, moving from the physical space to the digital can help enlarge the circle of Jewish interest and participation. It makes it easier to invite large audiences to “sample” Jewish life and perhaps find meaning in it. Cyberspace facilitates connections with young people, with those far away, with those who do not feel comfortable in community institutions and those seeking a cautious way to explore before committing for the long term (or who wish to remain occasional samplers). Alongside these advantages are also clear disadvantages, including a community with thin attachment and low levels of emotional investment and commitment.

The damage the pandemic brought upon the Birthright and Masa programs, which have been among the Jewish world’s most important and effective educational and identity building tools in recent decades, is inestimable. You can do a lot of things on Zoom, but a change in consciousness requires an unmediated interpersonal encounter, as happens on a long bus ride and in joint face-to-face activities between Israeli and Diaspora young people.

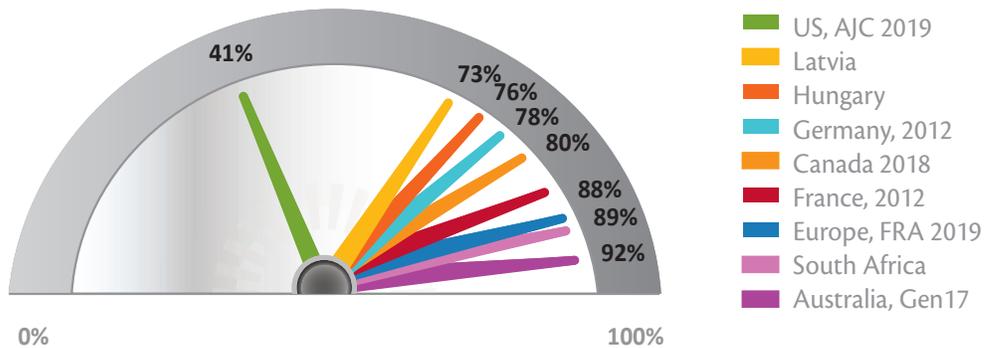
**Balancing the Short and Long Terms:** It is necessary to achieve a balance between these advantages and disadvantages that will be the product of two components. One – reality and its dictates. In a world in which social distancing is required, the Jewish community has no alternative but to continue investing in the digital

space; it is only there that it will be possible to continue conducting regular activities for large audiences. Only once the world returns to some semblance of normality will it be possible for the Jewish community and its institutions to hold physical space gatherings on the pre-coronavirus scale. Second – modifying the relationship between physical and digital activity in an effort to **take advantage of the considerable achievements in the digital arena during the crisis as a lever for future**

**action.** The goal of such a readjustment is to balance between the advantages of the tangible space (commitment, intimacy) and those of the digital space (expanded audiences, quick and easy connection). Of course, the optimal track is from digital to tangible. The digital space should be a portal that allows for daily accessible and inclusive connection – but which is also followed (to varying degrees) by connection in the tangible Jewish space which generates greater commitment.

## The Israel Visit Index

### Visits: Traveled to Israel at Least Once



In JPPI's 2019 Annual Assessment, we unveiled our Israel Visit Index. As mentioned, the question of visits to Israel serves as an approximation of the feeling of attachment between Israel and the Diaspora. The underlying assumption is that the higher the sense of attachment, the greater the desire to choose Israel as a travel destination and to visit at least once in one's life. One of the profound changes hitting the Jewish world during this coronavirus period is the almost total cessation of visits by Jews to Israel. For most countries, there can be no updates to the index readings as no surveys have

been published showing changes since last year's data were presented. The exception is the Jewish community of South Africa, on which two studies were published in the last year. One, from November 2019, on the Cape Town community,<sup>16</sup> and the other, published in March 2020, on South African Jews in general.<sup>17</sup> According to the data, a large majority of South African Jews have visited Israel at least once (89 percent). Twenty-one percent of Johannesburg respondents have visited Israel more than ten times, compared to 15 percent in Cape Town and 10 percent in Durban.

## Endnotes

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- 10 See ADL 2015. See also Koopmans, Ruul, “Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-groups. A Comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe.” WZB Berlin Social Science Center, WZB Mitteilungen, December 2013..
- 11 The percentage of French Jews who are considering migrating has declined since the 2012 survey. Over the course of this period, more than 25,000 French Jews (7.5% of the total community) relocated to Israel and tens of thousands more migrated to the United States.
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# INDICES

## 12

## Integrated Index: Polarization in Israel and US Jewry

- Political-ideological polarization in Israel is not deep and is in a moderating trend;
- Religious-traditional polarization both in Israel and in the United States, particularly between the Haredim and the other Jewish groups, is widening;
- Economic gaps are narrowing and there is a relative improvement in relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel;
- US Jewry is polarized along ideological lines and according to their affiliation with the various religious streams. This polarization extends to one's approach to Israel;
- In the United States, Jewish identity and Jewish practice are polarizing factors between young people (who tend toward thinner identification and observe fewer Jewish practices) and older people.

Over the past year and a half, the citizens of Israel have had to deal with three Knesset election campaigns and with significant health and economic challenges. U.S. Jews have experienced their own social and political struggles, similar health and economic challenges and rising anti-Semitism, as well as internal disagreement over

Israeli policy. This chapter offers a data-based index of polarization in Israeli society and in the Jewish community in the United States (the largest Jewish community outside Israel).

### What Are We Measuring?

The professional literature and our daily discourse include various definitions under the wide umbrella of “polarization” and there is no agreement about the phenomenon’s characteristics or its possible causes. The working definition for the purposes of this article is based on the cited paper by DiMaggio, et. al (1996, page 693). According to this definition, polarization is at once a condition and a process. Polarization as a condition relates to gaps between opinions and views among different groups on a given topic. Polarization as a process relates to distancing trends between the respective groups’ views over time.

As with JPPI’s other indices, the polarization index also attempts to offer a broad picture on a number of key issues. In this case, the trends in two societies: Israeli society – gaps in views and opinions in Israel; US Jewry – gaps between groups of American-Jews. This study will examine the question of polarization on a number of key issues.

## Part One: Israeli Society

In the sociological research, it is customary to relate to five main cleavage that threaten the unity of Israeli society: political, religious (the tradition axis), class (economic), national (Jewish-Arab relations), and ethnic.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the research has indicated that the ethnic divide is losing salience.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, this index relates to four polarizing factors.

### Political Polarization

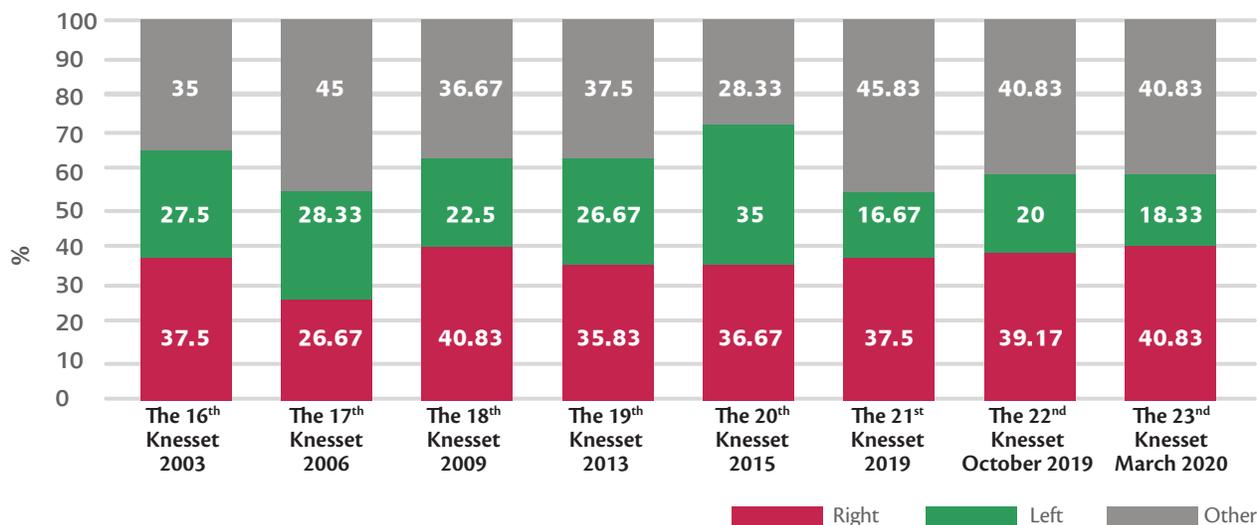
The spectrum of views in the Israeli political space moves along a right – left axis. Israel's multi-party system has created clearly defined parties at both ends, while at the same time allowing for the existence of centrist parties (ideologically and in terms of their willingness to join with other parties from both sides).

### Knesset Election Results

In examining the results of Knesset elections in recent years and by dividing parties along the political spectrum into the right (Likud, Israel Beiteinu, Yamina, Jewish Home, and the National Union); the left (Labor, Meretz, the Arab parties) and others, we see a broadening trend on the right and a narrowing one on the left (Graph 1).

Parties unaffiliated ideologically with one side or the other have garnered a larger share of Knesset seats compared to the past (in the last three elections, the centrist Blue and White party received 35, 33 and 33 seats, while Likud won 35, 32 and 36 respectively).

Graph 1: Knesset Election Results, by Parties of the Right, the Left and Others (2003-2020)



Source: Knesset website data

### Opinion Polls

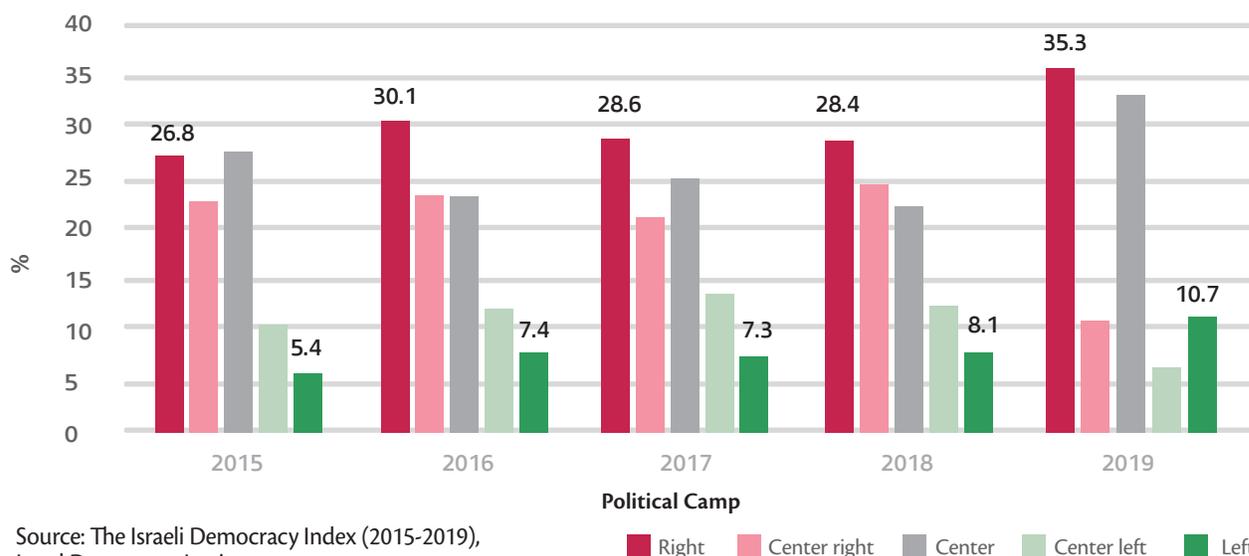
The 2016 Pew survey of Israeli society divides the political arena into three groups: right, left, and center. According to the survey's data, most of Israel's Jewish population place themselves in the center (55 percent of the wider Israeli Jewish population, and 62 percent of the secular population), 8 percent self-identify as supporters of the left, and 37 percent self-identify as supporting the right.<sup>3</sup>

In JPPI surveys, five categories are delineated: left, center-left, center, center-right, and right. Spreading these categories out along the ideological spectrum sharpens the intensity of identification with the right (33.5 percent self-identify as on the right, 26 percent as center-right), which has grown mainly at the expense of the center bloc (24.5 percent); 11.1 percent define themselves as center-left, and 5 percent as left.

Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) polls examining political affiliation also offer a scale of five camps: right, moderate right, center, moderate left, and left. As with the JPPI and Pew surveys, the right-wing group is the largest, with the center parties following (Graph 2). In both five-category surveys, decisions over whether to add the intermediate groups to the center or to the parties at the ends of the spectrum set the general impression of the state of polarization. Either way, taken as a whole, the surveys show that Israelis are not strictly divided between two ideologically polarized groups.

The data show that there are gaps in affiliation between Israeli groups but that most of the population is in the center. As for trends, while gaps in election results are narrowing, public opinion polls show that the gaps widened in 2019, though the trend that emerges is mixed.

Graph 2: Affiliation to Political Camps (Jews), 2015-2019



Source: The Israeli Democracy Index (2015-2019), Israel Democracy Institute.

### Religious Polarization (the Tradition Axis)

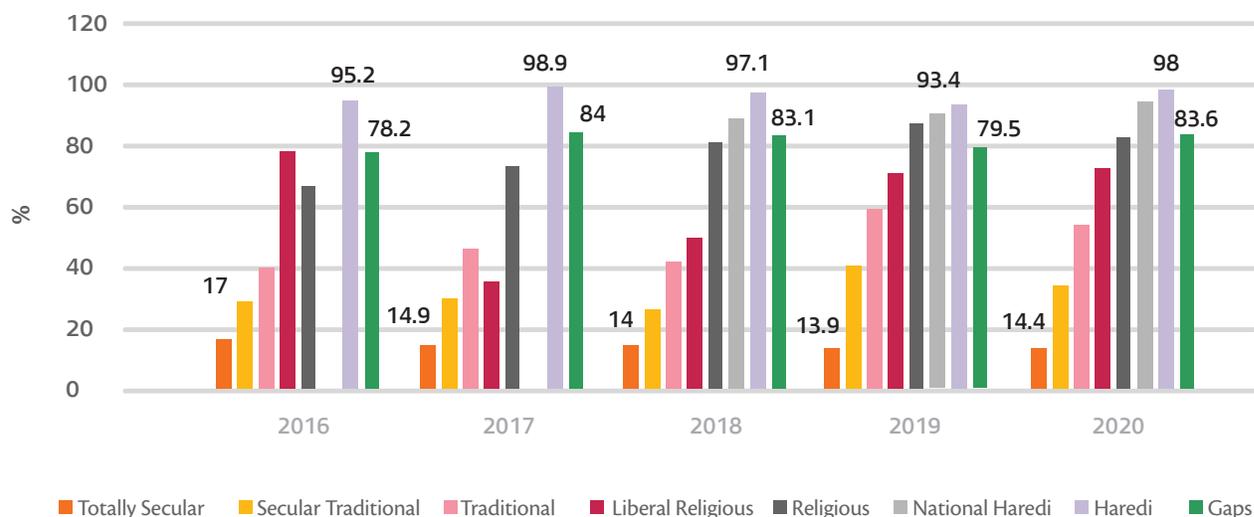
The data indicate a close link between political outlook and observing tradition. Secular Israelis vote at higher rates for Blue and White, traditional and religious Israelis vote at relatively higher rates for Likud, and the ultra-orthodox (Haredim) cast their votes for Shas or United Torah Judaism. These rates have intensified in most of the sectors over the past three elections.

Israel's population is estimated (December 31, 2019) at 9.136 million, of whom 74.1 percent are Jews (approx. 6.772 million), 21 percent are Arabs (1.916 million), and 4.9 percent "others" (approx. 448,000).<sup>4</sup> Among Jews, the accepted division is according to the scale of tradition observance, from secular to Haredi. According to data from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 10 percent of Jews define themselves as Haredi; 11 percent as religious; 13 percent traditional-religious; 22 percent as traditional/not that religious; and 43 percent as not religious/secular.<sup>5</sup> Positioning along the continuum reflects views on different topics, and effectively becomes a confounding variable of polarization.

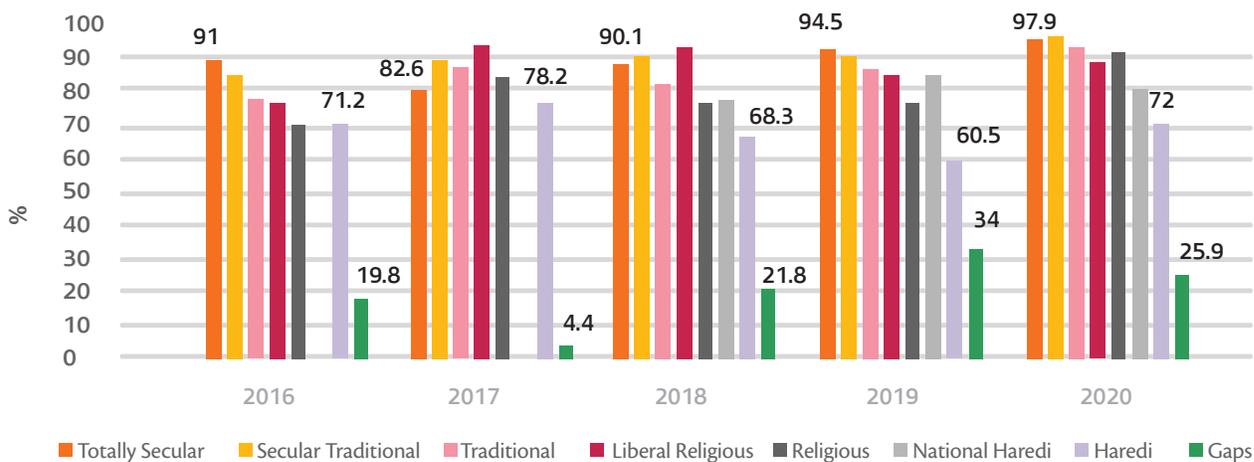
JPPI's annual pluralism survey asks respondents to rank the image of various sectors of Israeli society, which allows us to study the quality of relations between sectors as well as how each is perceived by the others. Specifically, it examines how different groups consider the contributions that other groups make to the success of Israel. Two groups receive the lowest score every year: Arabs and Haredim.

Graphs 3 and 4 describe how the contributions of the two groups at the ends of the religious spectrum – secular Jews and Haredim – are rated by other groups. While it is clear that every group tends to think that its own contribution to society is high, what is interesting is the gap between groups. Gaps in perceptions of the contribution of the secular group are small. Haredim value the secular contribution less than other groups but still rate it high. In contrast, secular assessments of the Haredi contribution are very low. These gaps indicate polarization that finds expression, among other things, in political struggles over issues of religion-state balance in Israel, which is mainly perceived as a struggle between Haredim and the rest of the population.

Graph 3: Percent who believe **Haredim** make a positive contribution to the success of Israel – along the Tradition Axis



Graph 4: Percent who believe that **Secular Jews** make a positive contribution to the success of Israel – along the Tradition Axis



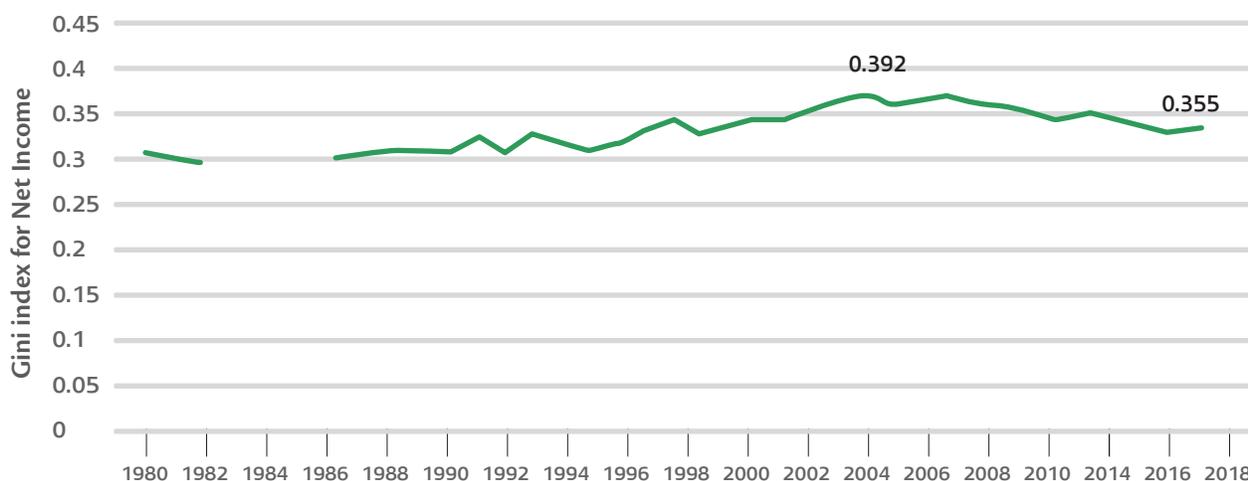
Source: JPPI's Pluralism Index

### Class Polarization (Economic)

JPPI’s 2016 Annual Assessment addressed at length two population sectors living side-by-side: the “Startup Nation” and the “Stagnation Nation.” One has jobs and steady incomes, the other lacks employment security and sometimes has to fight for its basic rights.<sup>6</sup> Studies indicate that economic inequality exacts a social price, even if it has little impact on economic growth.

The Gini Index is the internationally accepted instrument for measuring income gaps and income inequality between different population sectors within a country. The index’s values range from 0 (equality) to 1 (inequality). After reaching a record high in 2006, we have seen – over an extended period – a downward trend, i.e. reduced inequality and narrower economic gaps between Israeli population sectors.

Graph 5: Gini Index for Net Income, 1980-2018

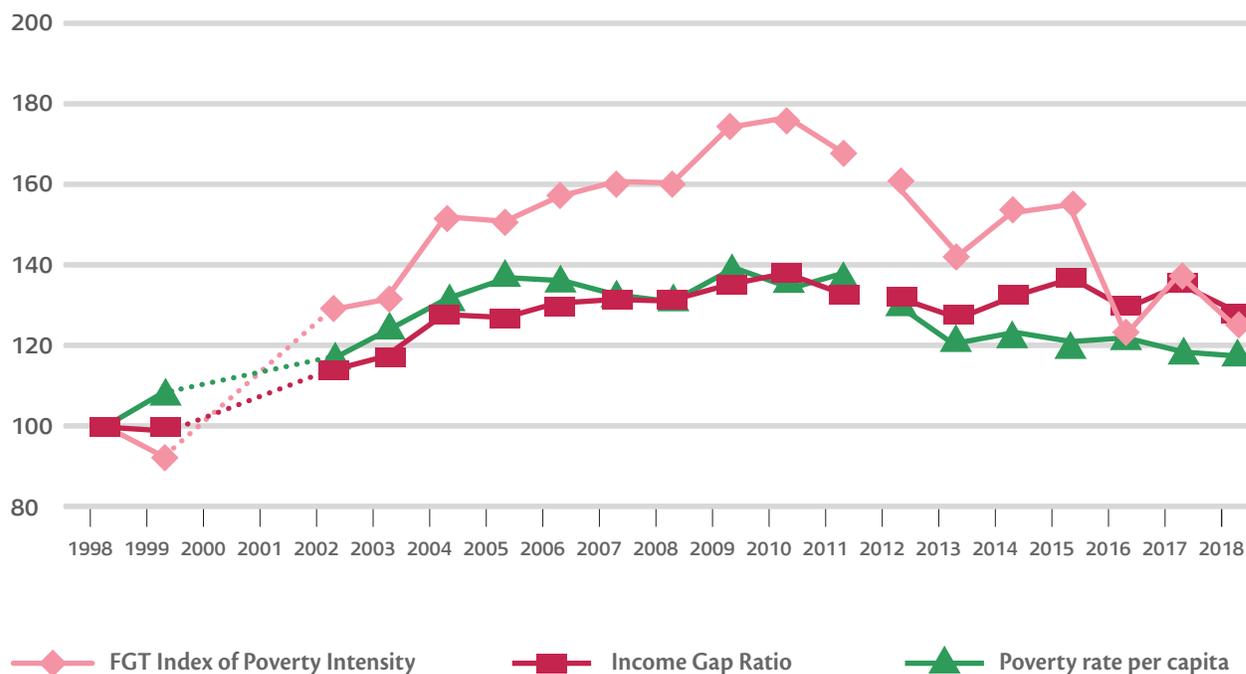


Source: Dahan, Momi, 2018, Income Inequality in Israel: A Unique Development

At a 2019 conference, the Governor of the Bank of Israel explained that notwithstanding the encouraging numbers, the level of inequality in Israel is high relative to other developed countries (the Gini Index stood at 0.34 in Israel, compared to an average of 0.32 among OECD countries, which puts it on the list of the ten countries with the highest inequality).<sup>7</sup> Another instrument for measuring economic

inequality in Israel is the Poverty Severity Index, which utilizes National Insurance Institute data to determine poverty rates and collective proximity to the poverty line. The Poverty Severity Index also shows that in recent years there has been a downward trend in Israeli poverty rates. In 2018, the severity of poverty in Israel declined by 5 percent to 33.3 percent. The indices have been fluctuating since 2012, but the overall trend indicates a decline.<sup>8</sup>

Graph 6: Indices of the Depth and Intensity of Poverty in the General Population



Source: National Insurance Institute, 2018, Magnitude of Poverty and Social Gaps, Annual Report

### National Polarization (Jews-Arabs)

In examining the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel, we focus on two variables: the extent to which individuals feel part of the general population; and the extent to which each sector perceives members of the other group as politically extreme. JPPI's pluralism surveys look at how comfortable people feel living in Israel. The proportion of those answering "very comfortable" plus "fairly comfortable" is very high, both among Jews (89 percent in 2020) and among Arabs (85 percent in 2020).

A similarly phrased question appears in IDI Democracy index: "To what extent do you feel

you are a part of the state of Israel with all its problems." The gap between Jews and Arabs in answering this question is very large. While the overwhelming majority of Jews feel part of the State of Israel, the proportion of Arab respondents who feel 'part of the State of Israel' was 58.9 percent in 2014 and fell to 32.4 percent in 2015. Despite a slight rise in recent years, it was 41.9 percent in 2019 (compared to 58 percent who said they feel this 'to a slight degree' or 'not at all').

JPPI also asked: "How many of Israel's Arabs/Israel's Jews are politically extreme?" The main

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gap between the groups was in perceptions of the proportion of extremist Arabs. At the same time, a clear increase (from 2018 to 2020) was

found in the proportion of Arabs who believe that a significant part of Israel's Jewish population is extremist.

**Table 1: How many of Israel's Arabs/Israel's Jews are politically extreme?**

	How many <b>Jews</b> in Israel are politically extreme?			How many <b>Arabs</b> in Israel are politically extreme?	
	2020 (Arabs)	2018 (Arabs)	2018 (Jews)	2018 (Arabs)	2018 (Jews)
Total: A few	35%	50%	66%	69%	41%
Very few	19%	23%	19%	44%	8%
Some	16%	27%	47%	25%	33%
Total: Many	55%	38%	28%	11%	52%
Many	19%	19%	23%	6%	30%
Most	36%	19%	5%	5%	22%
Don't know	10%	13%	6%	22%	8%

Source: Calculations based on data from JPPI's Pluralism Index, 2018, 2020.

Table 2: Integrated Index of Polarization in Israeli Society

Polarization type	Variable tested	Description of findings	Trend
Political	Election results	The center grew, mostly at the expense of the left-wing parties. The willingness to cooperate grew.	▼
	Opinion polls	<b>The center grew at the expense of the traditional left-right division.</b>	▼
Religious	Political preferences	Significant political gaps between groups along the tradition axis	▲
	Contribution to Israel by Haredim and Secular Jews	<b>Large gaps in perceptions of the contribution by Haredim</b>	Mixed
Economic	Gini Index	0.35 (1 = full inequality; 0 = full equality). A large gap compared to other OECD countries	▼
	Indices of the depth and intensity of poverty	Israel is among the leaders (i.e., the less good) in poverty among developed nations.	▼
National (Jews/Arabs)	Proportion who feel comfortable in Israel	<b>Negligible differences between Jews and Arabs</b>	Mixed
	Feel part of the State of Israel and its problems	<b>Wide gaps between Jews and non-Jews.</b>	Mixed
	Proportion of Jews/Arabs in Israel who are politically extreme	Rise in the proportion of Arabs who perceive most Jews as politically extreme.	▲

## Part Two: US Jewry

Relations between Diaspora Jews and the non-Jewish societies in which they live are an important engine in shaping Jewish identity.<sup>9</sup> Conflicting directions of influence – on one hand, the wish to integrate, and on the other, the wish to preserve unique characteristics – underscore (as in the Israeli case) a number of polarizing factors. Ideology, identification with the Jewish streams, intergenerational characteristics, influence of intermarriage, and connection to Israel are among the factors describing gaps in Diaspora views mentioned in studies.

### Political-ideological and inter-stream polarization

More than other groups in the United States, Jews tend to vote for the Democratic Party and identify with liberal positions.<sup>10</sup> This tendency has increased slightly since the 1980s. However, US Jews are not a homogeneous group, and the political polarization between Jewish groups run parallel to religious stream affiliation. The Orthodox lean more toward conservatism and support for the Republican Party, while Conservative and Reform Jews lean toward liberal positions and support for the Democrats.

The 2018 and 2019 American Jewish Committee (AJC) opinion polls modified the division between Jewish groups to distinguish between Haredim

and Modern Orthodox. Between 2012 and 2017, Orthodox identification with the Republican Party fell from 48.9 percent to 43.2 percent. If we continue to look at all the Orthodox together, in 2017 their support for the Republicans rose to 45 percent and in 2019 to 54.7 percent. However, the division of the Orthodox into two groups enables us to discern nuances. Among the Modern Orthodox, support for the Republicans stood at 30.4 percent in 2018 and fell to 26.5 percent in 2019, while Haredi support for the Republicans stood at 54.7 percent in 2018 and rose to 68.1 percent in 2019. Among those who identify as secular or “just Jewish” and among Conservative Jews, there are majorities of varying size for the Democratic Party. There is an intensifying trend of support for the Democrats among Reform Jews too, (from 56.1 percent in 2012 to 64.1 percent in 2019).

As JPPI’s 2017 Annual Assessment pointed out, political ideological gaps between the streams impact both societal integration strategies and American identity generally. The liberal strategy favors values of pluralism, tolerance, and equality while diminishing religious and cultural markers that strengthen difference. The conservative strategy shares the culture and ethical values of the wider society but implements them within the community, according to its traditions, while advancing its own survival and welfare.

### Attitudes regarding the gay community

To examine how ideological gaps are reflected among American Jews with respect to a general social issue, we looked at questions related to homosexuality. The Pew Research Center surveyed Jewish views on the subject at two points of time, in 2014 and 2007. Overall, the data point to broad agreement among Jews that homosexuality “should be accepted” (79 percent in 2007 and 81 percent in 2014).

A 2018 American Values Atlas survey studied support for same-sex marriage and found a similarly-high rate of acceptance among American Jews (77 percent).<sup>11</sup>

Based on Pew data, we can also identify differences according to political ideology in regard to homosexuality (73 percent of Jewish Democrats support acceptance, compared to 19 percent of Republicans; 50 percent of Jewish liberals, compared to 13 percent of conservatives). There are intergenerational gaps as well (34 percent of Jewish baby boomers believe that homosexuality should be accepted, compared to 25 percent of millennials). Although these surveys do not examine Jewish denominational affiliation,

they do test for the importance of religion in the respondents’ lives. Among those who say that religion is very important, 61 percent accept homosexuality; among those who say religion has some importance in their lives, 91 percent accept homosexuality; and among those for whom religion has no real importance in their lives, 90 percent accept homosexuality.<sup>12</sup> In other words, acceptance of homosexuality increases as religiosity decreases.

### Intergenerational polarization

AJC surveys examine the extent to which Judaism is perceived to be an important component in respondents’ lives. Most respondents, regardless of age, consider Judaism an important component of their lives. At the same time, those aged 70 and above are more likely to consider Judaism important to their lives, especially compared to those aged 30-39. The 2013 Pew survey of American Jews showed that the proportion of Jews who have no religion (i.e., they say they have no religion but are connected to Judaism in another way) increases as respondents age falls. This has resulted in significant intergenerational gaps in beliefs and practices.

Graph 7: Jewish Identity by Generation



Source: A Portrait of Jewish Americans, Pew, 2013

■ Jews by religion % ■ Jews of no religion %

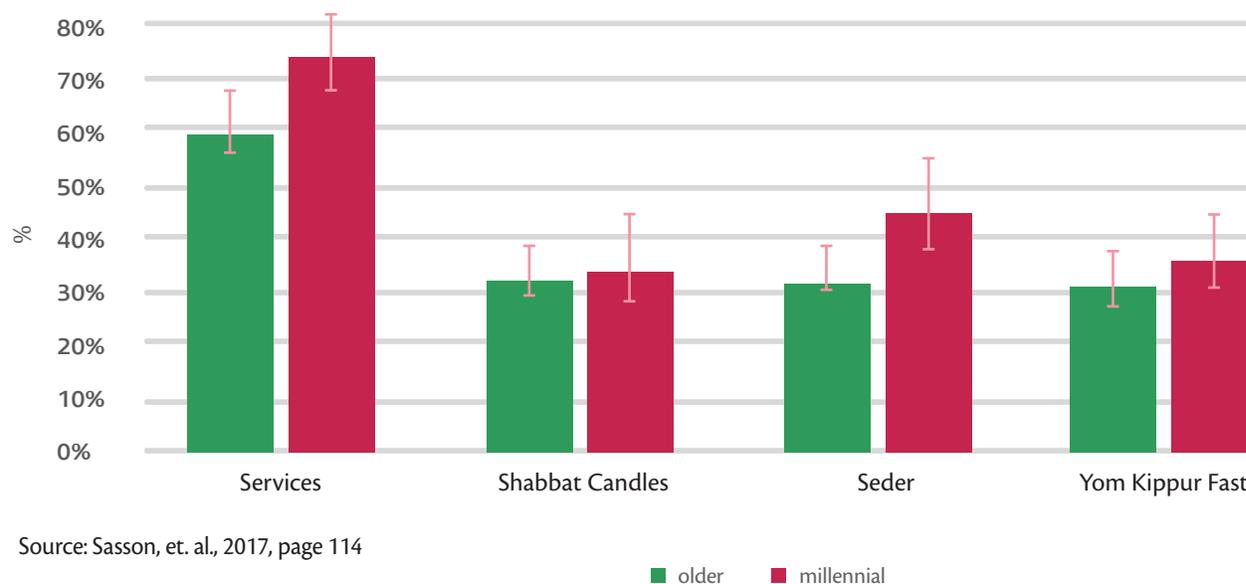
### The Impact of intermarriage

Intermarriage in the United States has been widespread in recent decades, and not just among Jews.<sup>13</sup> JPPI’s 2016 Structured Dialogue Process dealt with the Jewish spectrum in a time of fluid identity and devoted a chapter to this phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> The general consensus was that intermarriage affects the connection to the local Jewish community and to Judaism more broadly. Wertheimer and Cohen (2014) show that mixed

families have looser connections to the Jewish community and to Judaism than families in which both partners are Jewish. Those who are married to Jewish partners observe more Jewish practices than those who are married to non-Jews, and also more than unmarried Jews.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, some data (Sasson, et. al., 2017) point to a strengthening connection to Judaism among the children of intermarriage in recent years.

Graph 8: Jewish Practice of Adult Children of Intermarriage (Millennials and older)

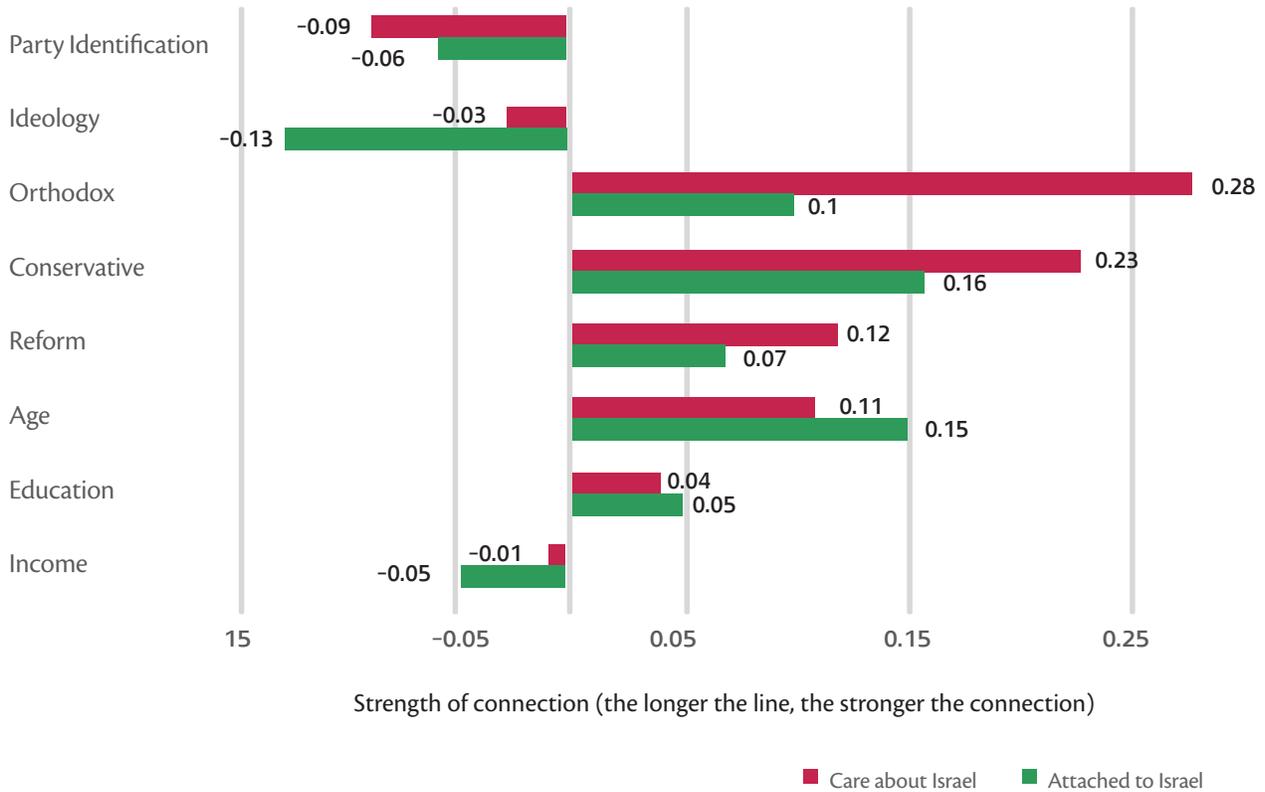


### Connection to Israel

Herbert Weisberg's 2019 book, *The Politics of American Jews*, presents a regression analysis of the various factors likely to influence the connection to Israel of American Jews based on two questions: "To what extent do you feel emotionally connected to Israel?" and "To what extent are you concerned for Israel?" The correlation score ranges from 0 to 1 or -1. The closer the number is to zero, the weaker the connection between the variables, and the closer it is to 1 (or -1), the stronger the connection. In Graph 9, line length (along the x axis) indicates

the strength of the connection to Israel for each of the questions and according to various demographic variables. We can see that the variables examined thus far here – politics and ideology, denominational affiliation (especially strong effect), and age – influence connection to Israel. Both stream and political party affiliation have more influence on the feeling of connection to Israel than on concern for Israel. The most influential demographic variable was found to be age. Older Jews tend to feel closer to Israel and to be more concerned for it.

Graph 9: Different Factors Influencing Connection of U.S. Jews to Israel



Source: Weisberg, Herbert F. "Politicized Attitudes on Israel." *The Politics of American Jews*, p. 143

### Israel and politics

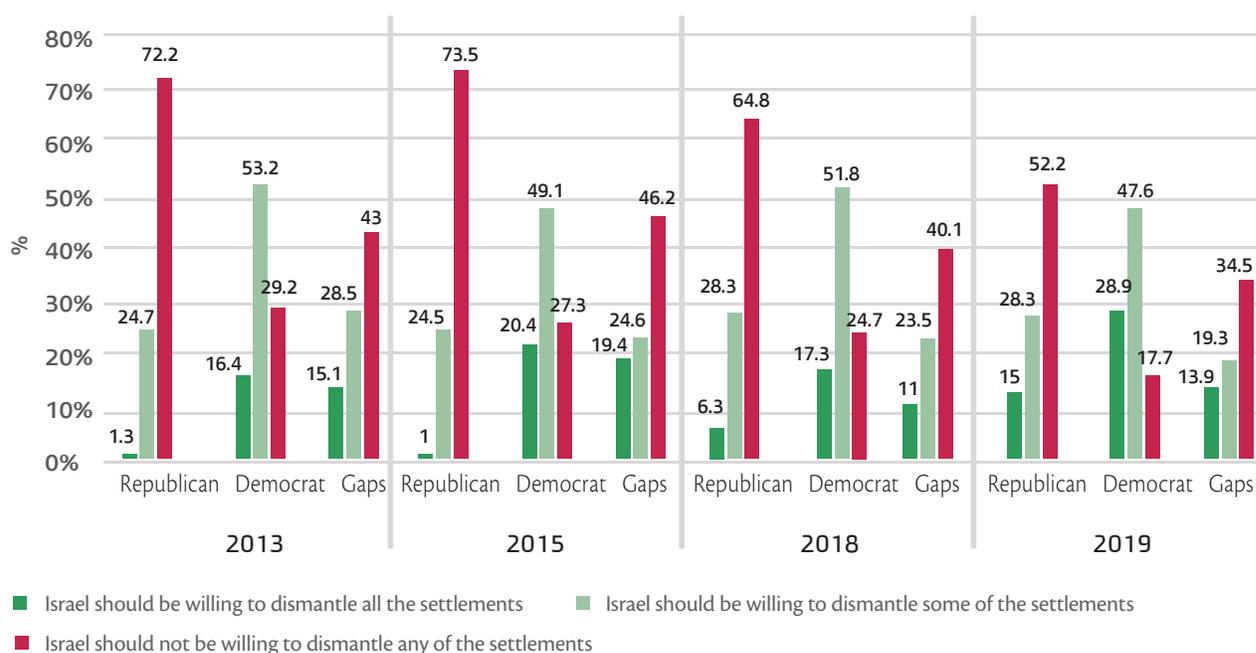
The annual AJC survey of American Jewish opinion includes questions related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We tested three positions on: settlement evacuation, support for or opposition to a Palestinian state, and the two-state solution. The data show that there are gaps between groups with mixed trends. Many Republican-supporting Jews (65.1 percent in 2018 and 48.9 percent in 2019) are opposed or very opposed to the two-state solution, while most

Democrats (72 percent in 2018 and 76.1 percent in 2019) are supportive or very supportive of a two-state solution (there are insufficient data to examine the gaps over time). On the question of evacuating settlements, most Jewish Republicans oppose evacuation (72.2 percent in 2013 and 52.2 percent in 2019) and most Democrats (69.9 percent in 2018 and 76.5 percent in 2019) favor a complete or partial settlement evacuation. At the same time, the Graph 10 shows that for

each of the options (full evacuation, partial evacuation, or no evacuation), the polarization trend (the gap) is narrowing, particularly due to diminishing opposition to evacuation among Republicans. On the question of a Palestinian

state, we find gaps based on political affiliation, with most Democrats (69.2 percent) in favor; among Republicans, only 29.7 percent are in favor. It is not possible to point to a clear trend over time.

**Graph 10: As part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians, should Israel be willing to dismantle all, some, or none of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank? (by year and political view)**



Source: AJC surveys

The 2019 Pew survey of American views on Israelis and Palestinians provides further insight into the differences between American-Jews' attitudes toward the Israeli government and attitudes toward the Israel public. In this examination, the gaps between Democrats and Republicans are clear. Support for the Israeli public are fairly similar (with Republicans

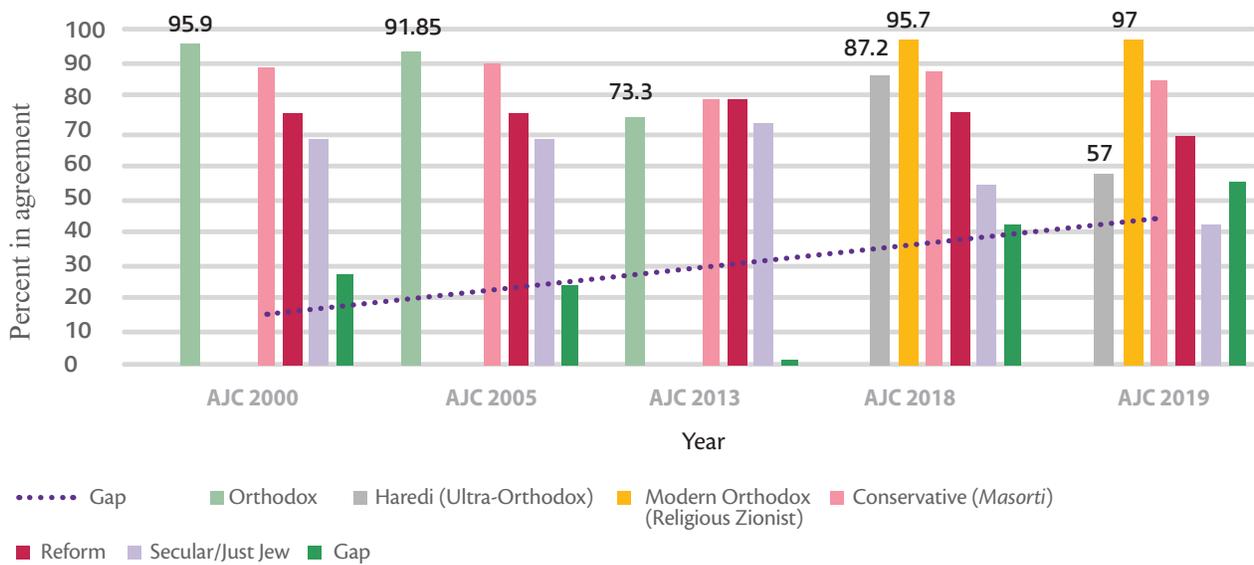
more supportive, but not by a large margin). In contrast, when we speak of support for the **Israeli government**, the gap is real: among Republicans, support stands at 94.7 percent, with most (68.4 percent) being very supportive. Among Democrats, the rate of support is 58.1 percent, with 46.5 percent saying they are supportive but not very supportive.

### The “Streams” and the Connection to Israel

In most surveys, the Orthodox tend to agree more than other groups with the statement: ‘Caring about Israel is an important/very important part of my being a Jew.’ At the same time, the rate of agreement in the other groups

exceeds 50 percent. The AJC surveys (and the 2013 Pew survey) show widening polarization on this question according to stream affiliation. The largest gap between the groups, which stood at 27 percent in 2000, rose to 55 percent in 2019.<sup>16</sup>

**Graph 11: Proportion who agree with the statement: ‘Caring about Israel is an important/ very important part of my being a Jew.’**



Source: AJC Surveys

Table 3: Integrated Index of Polarization in the U.S. Jewish community

Polarization type	Variable tested	Description of findings	Trend
Political/ideological and between streams	Stream affiliation, political/ideological identification	Polarization between the Orthodox and all other groups	▲
Generational	Importance of Judaism in their lives	No significant differences indicating polarization	Mixed
	Jewish identity	The “no religion” group is larger among those born after 1980 (32%) vs. those born between 1928 and 1945 (14%)	▲
	Practices	Intermarriage correlates to a decline in observing traditions; a growing number of children of intermarried families are involved in Jewish life	▼
Connection to Israel	Ideological-political polarization	Narrowing gaps between groups on settlement evacuation	▼
		Opinion gaps vis-a-vis creating a Palestinian state	Mixed
		Gaps in the rate of agreement with the statement 'Caring about Israel is an important/ very important part of my being a Jew'	▲
	Ideological-religious polarization	Gaps between the streams	▲
Internal social issues	Attitude regarding homosexuals	Gaps based on ideology, generation, and religiosity	Mixed

Endnotes:

- 1 As with polarization, divides also relate to gaps between groups. According to Peres and Ben-Rafael (2006), a divide relates to the gaps (breadth) and to the severity of the conflict (depth) between two groups.  
Samucha, Sami, "Class, Ethnic and National Divides and Democracy in Israel", in Uri Ram (ed.), **Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives**, Brirot Publishing, 1993, pp. 172-202.  
Peres, Yohanan, and Ben-Rafael, Eliezer, **Proximity and Quarrel – Divides in Israeli Society**, Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Sapir Academic College.
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- 6 "Jewish People Ways and Means", published in the 2016 Annual Assessment of the Jewish People Policy Institute, [http://jppi.org.il/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/JJPI\\_2016\\_Annual\\_Assessment.pdf](http://jppi.org.il/new/wp-content/uploads/2016/JJPI_2016_Annual_Assessment.pdf)
- 7 <https://www.boi.org.il/he/NewsAndPublications/PressReleases/Documents/%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%92%D7%AA%20%D7%94%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%99%D7%93%20%D7%91%D7%9B%D7%A0%D7%A1%2%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%97%D7%A7%D7%A8.pdf>
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- 11 Jones, Robert P, Daniel Cox, Robert Griffin, Molly Fisch-Friedman, and Alex Vandermaas-Peeler, "Emerging Consensus on LGBT Issues- Findings from the 2017 American Values Atlas," PRRI, 2018
- 12 Pew, Views about Homosexuality among Jews, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/jewish/views-about-homosexuality/>
- 13 Pew, 2015, **America's Changing Religious Landscape**.
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- 15 Sasson, Theodore, Janet Krasner Aronson, Fern Chertok, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe. "Millennial Children of Inter-marriage: Religious Upbringing, Identification, and Behavior Among Children of Jewish and Non-Jewish Parents." *Contemporary Jewry* (2017) 37:99–123
- 16 It is likely that part of the reason for the gap is the separation between Haredim and Modern Orthodox in 2019.

## 13

## Israeli Society Index

JPPI's Pluralism Index survey was conducted under the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, and immediately after Israelis had been subjected to their third round of tense and difficult elections in the space of a year. The survey reveals that these events have not, at least up to this point, significantly undermined the Israeli sense of cohesion. The "comfort index," which looks at whether Israelis feel "comfortable being themselves in Israel," there was virtually no change compared with last year. Similarly, most Israelis, both Jews and non-Jews, feel like "real Israelis," at least to some degree.

Below are a few of the findings from this year, followed by a discussion of their significance:

1. A dramatic increase, compared with last year, in the percentage of non-Jews who consider their primary identity to be "Israeli," and a concurrent sharp decline in the percentage of those who define their identity as "Palestinian."
2. At the same time, only one out of five non-Jews believes that there was once a (Jewish) temple on the Temple Mount. A substantial majority of Muslims in Israel believe that there was no temple on the Temple Mount. Additionally, most non-Jews think that a large proportion of, or most, Israeli Jews are "extremist."
3. The Chief Rabbinate's negative image in the eyes of Israeli Jews. Only 14 percent of Israeli Jews feel that the Chief Rabbinate is a vital, well-functioning institution. However, only one in five Israeli Jews supports dissolving the Chief Rabbinate.
4. Other findings attest to the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) sector's negative image regarding its contribution to the state. Most secular Israelis feel that Israeli society treats the Haredim too well.
5. Nearly half of Israeli Jews think that the Law of Return should remain in its current form. Most of the others feel that sections of the Law should be modified to stiffen eligibility criteria. Very few (6%) think the Law should be repealed.

6. A substantial majority of Israeli Jews support the operation of public transportation on Shabbat. Car ownership (or non-ownership) has no real impact on opinions regarding this issue.

### The Coronavirus Crisis

The health and economic crisis in which Israel and the world were mired while the Pluralism Index was under preparation, had no direct bearing on the Index. The purpose of the Index is to identify long-term trends, not to respond to short-term developments. Nevertheless, crises often generate turning points whose impacts persist after the crisis has passed. In this context, it is worth looking at certain Index data relating to groups that have figured prominently in the current crisis.

Two such statistics relate to the attitude of non-Haredi Israelis toward Haredi Israelis. Over the course of the coronavirus crisis, much attention has been paid to the way Haredi society has coped with the government issued directives that have necessitated severe modifications of daily life in Israel. Haredi society has relatively little trust in the major state institutions, and this has been reflected in the fact that major subgroups within it were slow to implement guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and other governmental decision-makers.<sup>1</sup> The conspicuousness of these groups – the need to attend to them separately, their infection rates, and the necessity of devoting special resources to them – may have an impact

on both the internal Haredi system (leadership, values, attitudes toward state institutions) and on the attitudes of other Israelis toward the Haredim.

Each year, the Pluralism Index assesses attitudes toward different groups within Israeli society, and the Haredim consistently place at the bottom of the “contribution to the state” scale (this doesn’t mean they don’t contribute, but rather that other Israelis perceive them as not contributing). They rank low on the scale again this year, and when we adjust for the responses of Jews and non-Jews, the Haredi contribution to the state is perceived as the lowest of all the groups assessed (the current Index looked at 17 groups; for most of them, there was no real change from last year).

This year, the “contribution to the state” query was supplemented by a more detailed question aimed at discovering whether Israelis feel that Jewish societal attitudes toward various minority groups are “not positive enough,” “positive,” or “too positive.” On this question (as on the “contribution to the state” question), there was a real disparity in the responses according to the respondent’s place on the religiosity scale. Half the secular population feels that attitudes toward Haredim are too positive. In contrast, half of the Masorti (traditionalist) and religiously observant (non-Haredi religious) respondents indicated that attitudes toward the Haredim are positive, or not positive enough. That is, they think that current attitudes should be maintained, or improved. As noted, these data were gathered during, and against the background of, the coronavirus crisis.

They reflect attitudes toward the Haredim during a given period characterized by the tumult of the crisis. The data need to be re-examined in the coming years, to determine whether, and to what degree, they changed after the crisis, and also in relation to developments within Haredi society itself, if any.

### Religion and State

In the three election campaigns held in Israel over the past year, points of disagreement on issues of religion and state were often prominent. In the past year, at least until the start of the coronavirus crisis, which forced Israelis to seclude themselves in their homes, real change could be discerned regarding the operation of public transportation on Shabbat – change initiated and funded by municipalities across the country. This development emerged during the period when the national political discourse was preoccupied with election issues; municipalities and local councils saw an opportunity to create facts on the ground.

It has been known for some time that the Israeli public supports public transportation on Shabbat.<sup>2</sup> However, the common claim that public transportation is of special importance to Israelis who lack access to private cars, has not been evaluated in depth. The JPPI index indicates that this argument is specious, for two reasons. First, a large proportion of those with no access to private cars are Israelis who vehemently object to public transportation on Shabbat (mainly

Haredim). Second, among those that support full or partial transportation on Shabbat, there is no significant difference between car owners and those without access to private vehicles. That is, most Israelis take principled stands on the issue of public transportation on Shabbat – stands that are rooted, not in their specific life circumstances, but in where they are situated along the religiosity spectrum. Fifty-six percent of the total sample and 52 percent of non-car-owners feel that public transportation should operate on Shabbat (either with no restrictions, or with the exception of religious cities and neighborhoods).

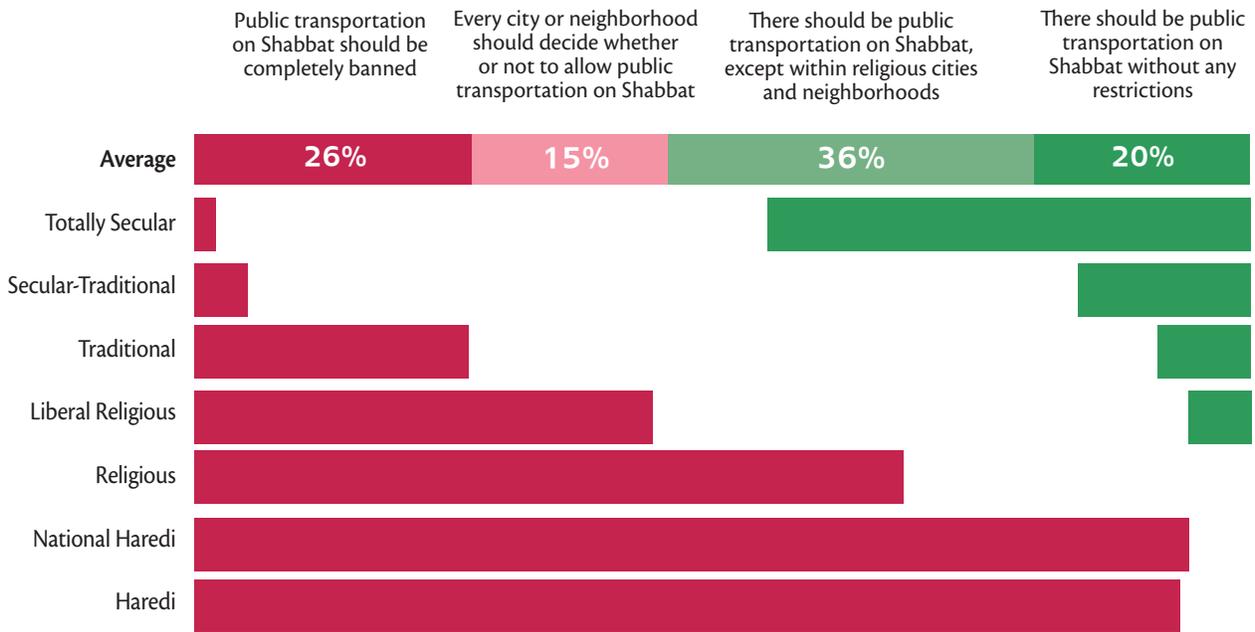
Where Israeli Jews are situated on the religiosity scale has a strong influence, but is not the sole determining variable, regarding their attitude toward the role and functional status of Israel's Chief Rabbinate. This institution's image has been tarnished for many years,<sup>3</sup> and the JPPI survey indicates that only a small percentage of Israeli Jews (14%) feel both that the Chief Rabbinate is necessary and that it functions properly. The rest of the Jewish population feels that its functionality should be improved, or that its powers should be curtailed, or that it should be dissolved entirely. When the respondents are divided into two groups – those who want a functioning Chief Rabbinate with powers, and those who either want a curtailed Chief Rabbinate or feel that the institution is altogether unnecessary – one finds disparities based on religiosity. Most of those who fall into the religiously observant category do not think the Chief Rabbinate functions properly but would like it to. In contrast, the

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majority of slightly-Masorti secular Jews feel that the Chief Rabbinate’s powers should be severely curtailed (not just that its functionality should

be improved, 54%), while half of “totally secular” Jews (48%) think that the institution should be eliminated.<sup>4</sup>

### With regard to the debate about public transportation on Shabbat, which of the following statements is closest to your view (Jews only)



### Jews and Non-Jews

For the past four years the pluralism survey has also included non-Jews as a group. The survey is administered by phone in Arabic and looks at issues that are both the same and different from those covered by the questionnaire for Jews. Among other things, the survey investigates aspects of identity via different cross-sections, including the question of what one’s primary identity is, from among several options: Arab,

Israeli, Palestinian, or Arab Israeli. This year a very meaningful difference was detected on this question, compared with last year, mainly in the responses of Muslim Arabs (who constitute the decisive majority of non-Jews in Israel). The change consists primarily of a steep rise in the percentage of those who define their primary identity as “Israeli,” versus a substantial decline in the percentage of those who define themselves

as “Arab,” and a sharp drop in the percentage of those who define themselves as “Palestinian.” In fact, in this year’s survey fewer than one in ten non-Jews in Israel said that their primary identity was “Palestinian,” while a quarter of the respondents (23%) defined themselves as “Israeli.” The percentage of respondents who self-defined as “Arab Israeli” remained virtually unchanged, such that, on the whole, nearly three out of four non-Jews in Israel defined themselves as “Israeli” or “Arab Israeli.”

The reasons behind this development are not clearly known. We need to wait for other surveys to see whether the change is a real one that will persist over the long term. It should be noted that other surveys, with unidentical questions, have already shown that the percentage of Arabs in Israel who self-identify as “Palestinian” is declining.<sup>5</sup> If this is indeed a development with staying power, there can be no doubt that a significant change has taken place in Arab Israeli society. A consultation with two statisticians (Professor Camil Fuchs and STATNET research institute founder Yosef Miklada) raised two hypotheses regarding the nature of the change which, as noted, will be verified or refuted only once additional surveys have been conducted.

One of these hypotheses is that the change reflects one of two technical issues. It is possible that sampling disparities caused a certain discrepancy between the surveys (though the differences between the findings are significant, making it hard to assume that a sampling gap was the sole

factor). Another possible technical reason for the difference would be questionnaire structure. Because the question about the degree to which respondents feel like real Israelis appeared earlier in the questionnaire, it could be that this had a priming influence on the subsequent responses about identity.

The other, more important, hypothesis is that this year’s significant change was election-related: that it resulted from the discourse surrounding the elections; the substantial Arab election-day turnouts; and the notable presence of the party representing most Arab voters (the Joint List<sup>6</sup>) in the Israeli political arena, including coalition-building efforts and other parliamentary maneuvers. To this we may add the high visibility of Arab medical personnel during the coronavirus crisis. Much has been said and written this year about the 2019-2020 election period as a turning point in terms of Arab willingness to participate in the national political sphere.<sup>7</sup> It is likely that the JPPI survey reflects this change and the way in which it is also reshaping Arab Israeli consciousness.

Arab Israeli participation in Israel’s political system is, of course, a desirable trend. However, a number of obstacles remain that make it hard for the community’s political representation to join the Jewish-majority parties in full, or even in unstable (“outside support”) coalition structures. Israeli social researchers would obviously have a much easier time of it if all of the data from all public opinion polls pointed in the same direction, but that is not the case. Despite the sharp upturn,

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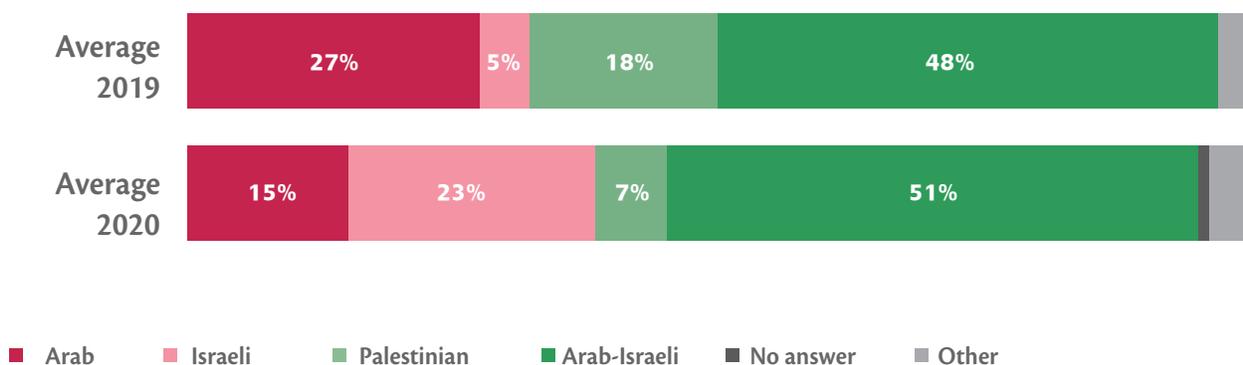
shown by the 2020 JPPI survey, in the share of Arabs attesting to an Israeli identity, and saying that they feel like “real Israelis” (two-thirds, if we include those who share that sentiment to a certain degree as well as those who fully embrace the attitude), one can discern stumbling blocks that hamper the minority’s complete integration in Jewish-majority society. This year, such signs are clearly visible in the non-Jewish responses to the question of whether a Jewish temple ever stood on the Temple Mount.

This is a highly fraught issue for both sides of the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given the “denial by religious Muslims and many others of the historical link of Jews to the Temple Mount, the Western Wall, and the city [Jerusalem] in general, and on the Jewish side, non-recognition of the importance of Jerusalem to Muslims prior to the emergence of Zionism.”<sup>8</sup> Without touching on archeological findings or historical evidence, it is clear that a decisive majority of Jews in Israel (and elsewhere) believe that a Jewish temple stood on the Temple Mount. This belief transcends political

camp and is not influenced by views on how to resolve the conflict. In the eyes of the Jews, the Temple is a historical fact, the denial of which (and such denial has increased in recent years<sup>9</sup>) can be understood only as an attempt to undercut the historical link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. This is true when the denial comes from the leaders of the Palestinian Authority and is undoubtedly also true when it surfaces in Arab Israeli public opinion polling.<sup>10</sup>

Half of non-Jewish Israelis, and a substantial majority of Muslim Israelis (59%) believe that no Jewish temple ever stood on the Temple Mount. Another third say they don’t know, that is, they are not persuaded that there was a Jewish temple but they do not deny it (this figure may hint at educational potential, at least regarding those who have yet to form an opinion). Among Christian and Druze survey respondents (they were few, meaning that the possibility of a sampling problem exists), half say they don’t know, while a quarter explicitly deny that there was ever a Jewish temple on the Temple Mount.

### Main Identity (Non-Jews)



## Israel-Diaspora Relations

The Pluralism Index is primarily concerned with Israeli society, but it also includes elements of obvious interest to Diaspora Jewry. For example, there are questions about Israeli positions on issues that link Diaspora Jewry to Israel. This year, in the Pluralism Index framework, we looked at Jewish-Israeli positions on the Law of Return.

The Law of Return issue adds perspective to our discussion with regard to Jews in Israel and abroad. Of course, such perspective may suffer from bias due to the coronavirus crisis, and its ramifications on public attitudes toward immigration generally. But in this instance, what emerges from the survey seems to be rooted in additional factors, including a recognition that, in recent years, most immigrants to Israel under the Law of Return have not been Jewish, and that the percentage of non-Jews immigrating under the Law of Return is rising. This fact has often come up in the public discourse, especially in the past few years (including the 2019-2020 election cycles).<sup>11</sup>

The large share of non-Jews among recent immigrants, which is fundamentally undisputed though different interpretations exist regarding the exact numbers, is already causing some leaders, especially within the religiously observant and Haredi sectors, to suggest that the time has come to change the Law of Return's criteria. Chief Rabbi David Lau has proposed reassessing the Law, noting that

“Israel needs to decide if it wants to be a welfare state for the Third World, bringing in everyone who has a connection with Judaism, or perhaps only those who are Jews.”<sup>12</sup> The Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Yitzhak Yosef, has endorsed this view, stating that “Those who bring in masses of non-Jews to Israel through [the grandchild] clause due to alien considerations are being unfair first and foremost toward those immigrants, and placing them at every stage of their lives before the untenable reality of living in a Jewish state. Amending the Law of Return is first and foremost in the interest of those immigrants.”<sup>13</sup>

The Index data suggest that support for the Law of Return **in its current form** is eroding, and that less than half of the Jewish population approves of it unreservedly.<sup>14</sup> But JPPI's Pluralism Survey found that there are many Jews in Israel who feel that the Law of Return in its present formulation is too broad, and would like to circumscribe it. Some of them would be content with the elimination of the Law's grandchild clause (which allows the grandchild of a Jew to immigrate to Israel), while others favor an additional eligibility restriction that would allow only those who are themselves Jews to immigrate and become citizens. The support for a Law of Return with stricter criteria is particularly evident among the religiously observant and Haredi populations. This fact takes on additional importance given that a large share of those who support eligibility restrictions are also those who advocate

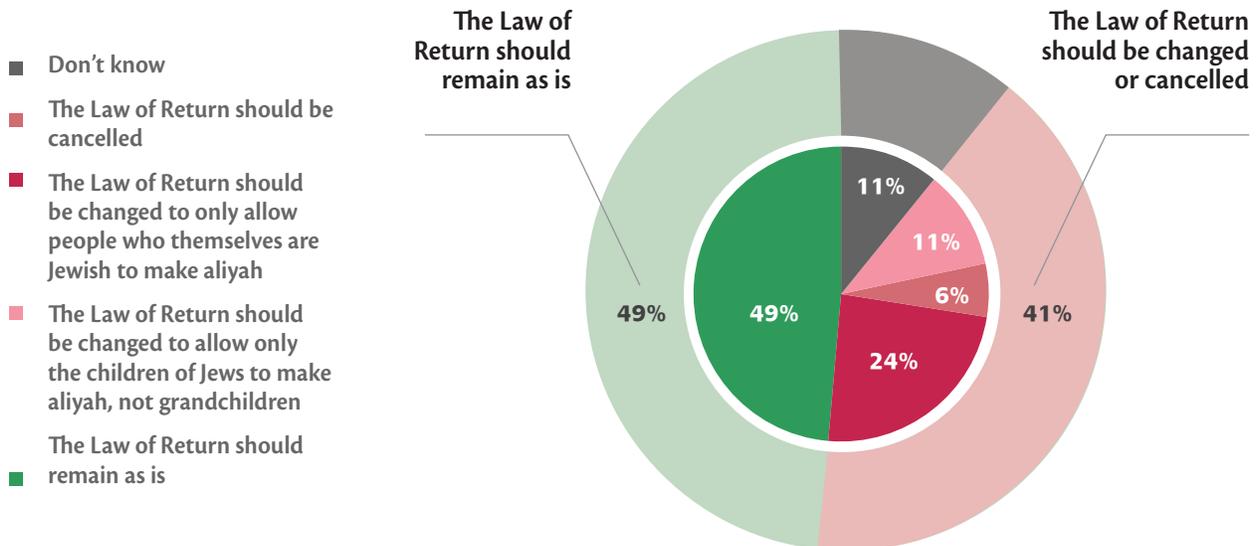
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limiting conversion recognition to the Orthodox sphere. The religiously observant/Haredi sector thus supports restrictions on two fronts – both in terms of the number of paths enabling one to join the Jewish people, and in terms of the criteria that allow those interested in doing so, to immigrate to Israel.

Here it is worth noting that a stiffening of the Law of Return criteria, even should it spark controversy, would not necessarily be unacceptable to Diaspora Jewry as a whole. In a JPPI Structured Dialogue on the Jewish spectrum from a few years ago, it emerged that “the growing fluidity of identity in Jewish

communities around the world is not leading all Jews to expect Israel relax its criteria for the Law of Return. The Dialogue discussions revealed that a large share of participants from non-Israeli communities felt that “the current definition, which refers to the grandparents’ generation, is too broad.” In accordance with those findings, JPPI also explicitly recommended reassessing “the criteria of the Law of Return,” based on the rationale that, “in light of the cultural and demographic changes in the Jewish world, Israel may want to consider whether changes in those criteria are necessary.”<sup>15</sup> However, JPPI recommended that the Law of Return not be amended “without a frank and thoroughgoing process of consultation with Diaspora Jewry.”<sup>16</sup>

### With regard to the Law of Return, which of the following statements is closest to your view (Jews only)



## Technical Information

The Pluralism Index is one of the products of JPPI's broader Pluralism Project, which is supported by the William Davidson Foundation, and this is its sixth publication. The 2020 Pluralism Survey was conducted by Prof. Camil Fuchs of Tel Aviv University. The editors of the Index are Shmuel Rosner and Noah Slepko, from JPPI. The baseline of the Index was written by JPPI senior fellow Brig. Gen. (Res.) Michael Herzog. JPPI fellows Dr. Shlomo Fischer, Amb. Avi Gil, and Dr. Inbal Hakman contributed to the analysis. The Survey included 604 respondents from Israel's Jewish sector through an internet panel, and another 273 respondents from Israel's non-Jewish sector via telephone. Respondents comprised a representative sample of the two populations surveyed. The Jewish sector survey was carried out by the Migdam Project, led by Dr. Ariel Ayalon. The sampling error is 4 percent at a significance level of 95 percent. The sampling error for the Arab survey, conducted by pollster Yosef Maklada, Director of the Statnet Research Institute, is 5.9%.

## Endnotes

- 1 See Shmuel Rosner, *Maariv*, <https://www.maariv.co.il/journalists/Article-757989>
- 2 See the Hiddush surveys indicating that two-thirds of the Jewish public support the operation of partial or full public transportation on Shabbat: [http://www.hiddush.org.il/Framework/Upload/ArticleImage\\_f014d6e2-bbc0-4249-a817-f4ec26549ddc\\_280.jpg](http://www.hiddush.org.il/Framework/Upload/ArticleImage_f014d6e2-bbc0-4249-a817-f4ec26549ddc_280.jpg)
- 3 See the Israel Democracy Index, in which the Chief Rabbinate regularly ranks at the bottom of the institutional scale. According to the 2017 Index, only 20% of Jews expressed trust in the Rabbinate: <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/20082>
- 4 In this context it is worth mentioning a finding of the Jewish People Policy Institute's #IsraeliJudaism project, namely that most young secular Israelis (under age 35) say they do not plan to marry via the Chief Rabbinate.
- 5 See the 2017 Shaharit survey, in which 14.6% defined their identity as Palestinian.
- 6 It is worth noting that, along with the rise in Arab electoral support for the Joint List, the 2020 elections showed a drop in Arab votes for "Jewish" lists, such as Blue and White and Labor-Meretz.
- 7 See: "The Spring's Back in Their Steps: Arab Politics Following the Twenty-Second Knesset Elections," Mohammad Darawshe, in *Bayan*, the Moshe Dayan Center.
- 8 Quote from: *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov, ed.), Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010. [https://jerusalem.institute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PUB\\_barriers\\_eng.pdf](https://jerusalem.institute.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PUB_barriers_eng.pdf).
- 9 See: *From Jerusalem to Mecca and Back: the Islamic Consolidation of Jerusalem*, Yitzhak Reiter, Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2005.
- 10 Less explicit signs of this denial can also be found in a Shaharit survey (2017) on the Jews' historical relationship to Jerusalem and the Land of Israel.
- 11 See "A Problematic Aliya: Only 53% of Immigrants to Israel in Recent Years are Jews," Binyamin Lashkar, *Mida*,

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- 2018.
- 12 “Chief Rabbi Lau to Haaretz: Law of Return a Problem,” Yair Ettinger, *Haaretz*, April 14, 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-lau-law-of-return-a-problem-1.5245039>
  - 13 “Rabbi Yosef Responds: Amending the Law of Return is First and Foremost in the Immigrants’ Interest,” Arik Bendar, *Maariv*, 2020.
  - 14 See: Israel’s Religiously Divided Society, Pew 2015. [https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/03/israel\\_survey\\_overview.hebrew\\_final.pdf](https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/03/israel_survey_overview.hebrew_final.pdf) [English version (2016): <https://www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/>]
  - 15 *Exploring the Jewish Spectrum in a Time of Fluid Identity*, Shmuel Rosner, John Ruskay, the Jewish People Policy Institute, 2016.
  - 16 *70 Years of Israel-Diaspora Relations: the Next Generation*, Shmuel Rosner, John Ruskay, the Jewish People Policy Institute, 2018.

## 14

## Integrated Index: Anti-Semitism

- Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spiked in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their impact, however, has, so far, been limited.
  - Following deadly mass shootings by right-wing extremists, communal action plans for security are necessary.
  - The most important trend for Western political leaders to watch is the radical (far-right, neo-Nazi, Islamist, far-left) forces that exploit anti-Jewish prejudices to attack the liberal order.
  - The most important trends for Jewish policy makers to watch are developments within the alt-right movement and those on the left advocating measures inimical to Jewish thriving.
  - It is recommended that the Israeli government deal with anti-Semitism with an integrative body that has the authority and capability to carry out the task.
- For several years, anti-Semitism has been measurably on the rise throughout the world. Between 2018 and 2019, the number of anti-Jewish incidents increased by 12 percent in the United States, 17 percent in Germany and 27 percent in France.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, radical actors have leveraged the COVID-19 pandemic to spread conspiracy theories, and anti-Semitism is one of their preferred themes. Since last year's Annual Assessment we have observed negative developments alongside positive and encouraging ones. In a context of mixed trends and considerable uncertainty, JPPI has developed its "Comprehensive Three-Dimensional Anti-Semitism Index" to weigh these developments.

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This report includes four parts. The first presents major recent and long-trend developments, negative and positive. The second presents selected quantitative data (anti-Jewish attitudes, number of anti-Semitic incidents, perceptions of Jews in regard to their acceptance in the surrounding environment)

from different countries. These figures are used to assess the impact of anti-Jewish hostility on organized and individual Jewish life. In the third part, we examine how the different developments and trends are interconnected. The final part lays out concrete directions for action.

### Monitoring the Level of Anti-Semitic Threat in Different Countries (based on perceived discomfort among Jews)

	USA	UK	Germany	France	Russia	Hungary	Sweden
Level of severity in <b>2020</b>	To be followed	Concern	Growing Concern	Growing Concern	To be followed	Concern	High Concern
Level of severity in <b>2017</b>	Slight Concern	To be followed	Concern	Growing Concern	To be followed	Concern	High Concern

## Part 1: In the Shadow of COVID-19

### Recent negative developments

- **Rise of conspiracy theories promoted by far-right actors.** In response to an appetite for a single-cause answer to the existential quandary experienced in some sectors, far-right actors and white supremacists have weaponized the coronavirus pandemic to repackage and disseminate racist tropes, pointing to a so-called “Jewish-controlled government that is exploiting the virus to serve Jewish interests.”<sup>2</sup>
- **The impact of these false theories is, however, limited.** An Oxford University study found that 19.8 percent of its respondents believed that Jews are behind the coronavirus, while 45.8 percent believed that “the coronavirus is a bioweapon developed by China to destroy the West.”<sup>3</sup>
- **BDS outreach to mainstream audiences.** Anti-Israel BDS forces have leveraged the coronavirus to defame Israel among the progressive left and beyond. Along with smears by known anti-Semites in Turkey and Iran, they have presented Israel as an even more terrible “virus” than COVID-19, and have distributed caricatures of Israel propagating the virus.
- **Deadly shootings and physical assaults.** Beyond the deadly synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh, Poway, and Halle (Germany) committed by right-wing extremists, we have also observed in the last few years a surge of violence directed at US Haredi Jews by their African-American and Hispanic neighbors (as part of endemic inter-ethnic tensions in New York City and its suburbs). Often underestimated because of the identity of the attackers, the identity of the assaulted, and its limited geographical scope, this bigotry resulted in more than a hundred assaults and two mass killings in 2019.<sup>4</sup> Even if the scope of this development is limited compared to the potentially dire impact of white supremacist ideology in America, this anti-Semitic violence requires the urgent attention of policy makers and entails interventions for mitigation and cessation.
- **Jews perceived as privileged in a context of economic downturn.** Impoverishment and massive unemployment are a breeding ground on which anti-Semitic movements have historically developed. While it is not yet clear how it will develop, the pandemic seems to be leading to widening social and economic gaps. Underprivileged sectors may be tempted by far-right and far-left conspiracy theories that scapegoat Jews as wealthy oppressors.

- **Jews are scapegoats for right- and left-wing populists.** White supremacists exploit the tragic and inexcusable death of George Floyd and claim that Jews are the organizing force behind the anti-system unrest in major US cities. Anti-Israel far-left extremists blame Israel – falsely – for training the police officers responsible for Floyd’s death, and draw an equivalency between police brutality in America and alleged Israeli brutality against Palestinians.
- **European far-left actors leverage anti-Jewish hatred to gain Muslim and far-right voters.** European far-left politicians – claiming not to hear the anti-Semitic slogans chanted at their mass rallies – systematically deploy radical anti-Israeli rhetoric to woo Muslim migrants and occasionally use anti-Semitic fear-mongering and conspiracy theories to entice newly impoverished middle-class voters away from far-right parties.

### Recent positive developments

- **President Donald Trump signed an executive order to protect Jewish students.** The order prohibits federal funding for colleges and universities that turn a blind eye to anti-Semitism.
- **Adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.** The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, which was first drafted in a

European Union committee as a non-binding definition, is slowly taking root worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

- **Engagement of state institutions to mitigate anti-Semitism.** These include the first UN report on anti-Semitism, several national rulings to limit online anti-Semitism and BDS activity,<sup>6</sup> and the nomination of special anti-Semitism envoys by a wider group of nations.<sup>7</sup>
- **Anti-Semitism scrubbed from Labour Party (UK).** Anti-Semitism within Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party was a factor in his 2019 electoral defeat by Boris Johnson. In concert with Jewish voices, Keir Starmer, Labour’s new leader, has vowed to “wash clean the stain of anti-Semitism from [their] party.”<sup>8</sup>
- **“Black Lives Matter” movement increased awareness of racism and minority rights.** This may present an opportunity to renew the Jewish-Black alliance so prominent in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s.<sup>9</sup> Alas, it may also nurture resentment against Israel and Jews, who are perceived as part of the oppressive white elites.

### Long-term trends

- After a seven-decade grace period following the Shoah, anti-Semitism has resumed and is becoming the “new normal” with which Jewish communities will have to contend.
- In a world in which significant segments of the population have experienced downward

social mobility and are worried that their horizons are grim, conspiracy theories flourish and the “Jew” reemerges as an iconic scapegoat that unites conspiracy traffickers from all political, religious, and social backgrounds. Taking advantage of digital means for free expression, simplistic theories demonizing the Jews are spread to millions, perhaps billions, of people across the internet.

- In Europe, anti-Semitism – visible and invisible – impedes the participation of Jewish communities in the life of their general societies and dissuades Jews from participating in local Jewish communal life (on the flip side: anti-Jewish attitudes steadily decrease in the population).
- In continental Europe, the main single determinant indicator of the sustainability of a Jewish community appears to be the percentage of Muslims in the population.
- In North America and Australia, anti-Semitism has almost no tangible impact on the social, academic, economic, or political integration of Jews in general society. Yet, in the last four years in the United States, anti-Semitic right-wingers have become emboldened in their willingness to express their Jew-hatred and act upon it. Similarly, anti-Semitic views on the left have increased and Jews (particularly on college campuses) feel more threatened by them. Most of the abuse from this quarter has been verbal and psychological, not physical.
- Anti-Zionism has become main-stream in Europe and frequently features traditional anti-Semitic components. Jews are often held accountable for the actions and policies of the Israeli government.
- The discomfort European Jews have long felt has crept into the American landscape. More American synagogues have begun adopting security measures, and this may advance an unconscious message that Jews are not “regular citizens” but rather “citizens at risk.”

## Part 2: Impact on Jewish Life

### The need for an integrated policy-planning tool regarding anti-Semitism

1. Many organizations monitor anti-Semitic phenomena and their work is commendable. But additional indicators, beyond the number of incidents, are necessary to assess discomfort levels among Jews and signal intervention priorities to policy makers. To illustrate this need, let's consider three kinds of phenomena that can't be identified *per se* as anti-Semitic and generally pass under the radar of observers. From a policy planning perspective, they are of critical importance in drafting appropriate directions for action.
2. **Attempts to ban Jewish practice.** New attempts to ban circumcision in Belgium, which follow last year's ban on kosher slaughter and seek to criminalize parents who circumcise their sons, are not anti-Semitic *per se* but they certainly affect the lives of Jews and their ability to feel accepted as normative citizens. It stigmatizes local Jews as adepts of anachronistic, barbaric, and criminal practices, limits their ability to live a full Jewish life, and may harm the long-term sustainability of organized Belgian Jewry.
3. **Roaring silences.** The reticence of politicians to issue condemning statements following anti-Semitic crimes, terror attacks in Israel, or anti-Jewish slogans chanted during political demonstrations is not overtly anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, their silence bears on how Jews perceive their acceptance (or lack thereof) in the country and is a critical indicator for policy makers.
4. **Denials.** The French justice system's December 2019 decision to declare the murderer of Sarah Halimi "not criminally responsible" as he was under the influence of marijuana at the time is legitimately not counted as an anti-Semitic incident. (Mrs. Halimi was a 65-year-old retired physician who, in 2017, was beaten in her Paris apartment and defenestrated by her drug-addicted neighbor, who shouted "Allahu Akbar" during the attack). Yet, many local Jews perceive this judicial ruling, which is one of a series, as a signal that French politicians, either fearing Muslim youth violence or motivated by electoral interest, can't anymore be fully trusted to protect their lives.

## Anti-Semitism in Western Europe and the United States

Data Point	Trend	US	France	UK	Germany
Hold anti-Semitic views (%) <sup>10</sup>	▼	10 <sup>11</sup> (10)	17 (37) <sup>12</sup>	36 (39) <sup>13</sup>	16 (27) <sup>14</sup>
Hold anti-Semitic views, among Muslims (%) <sup>15</sup>	▲	N/A	49 (83)	58 (54)	70 (62)
Violent assaults	▲	61 [39]	151 [183]	157 [124]	98 [62]
Total incidents (extreme violence, assaults, damage, desecration, threats)	▲	2,107 <sup>16</sup> [1,879]	687 <sup>17</sup> [541]	1,805 <sup>18</sup> [1,690]	2,000 <sup>19</sup> [1,770]
Change from prior period	▲	+12%	+27%	+7%	+13%
Rate of incidents per 1,000 Jews	▲	0.37 [0.33]	1.5 (1.2)	6.2 (5.8)	17.2 (15.3)
Anti-Semitism is a very serious or fairly serious problem (%) <sup>20</sup>	▲	73 <sup>21</sup> (76)	95 (86)	75 (48)	85 (40)
Considered emigrating because they do not feel safe in their countries (%) <sup>22</sup>	▲	N/A	44 (46) <sup>23</sup>	29 (18)	44 (25)
Avoid places in their neighborhood because they do not feel safe there as Jews (%) <sup>24</sup>	▲	8 <sup>25</sup>	35 (20)	68 (37)	35 (28)

Notes: Numbers without parentheses are for the year 2019/2020. Numbers in square brackets are from 2018, while those in parentheses are the most recent prior figures available. 'N/A' = not available. The last three questions were asked of Jewish residents in their respective countries.

The three dimensions of JPPI's Anti-Semitism Index look at 1) anti-Semitic attitudes; 2) anti-Semitic incidents; and 3) Jewish attitudes regarding anti-Semitism. This year's main new findings pertain to the United States:

1. Security threats significantly affect the lives of Haredi Jews.
2. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) estimates that 13 per cent of anti-Semitic incidents in

the United States last year were carried out by white supremacists. This means that the vast majority were not. Diffuse, inchoate hatred that's hard to tie directly to an ideological stream is very difficult to target.

3. Nevertheless, even if anti-Jewish hatred derives from various sources (white supremacists, far-right extremists, radical Islamists, Black Israelites, the far left, BDS

advocates), the threat that demands special attention and could have the most critical impact on Jewish thriving in North America comes from white supremacists. White supremacists are organized, draw on a constructed ideology, are deeply-rooted in the American cultural landscape, and respond to widespread anxieties spurred by an inevitable demographic shift.

Among the main findings for Europe are:

1. Local governments could do more for Jews to increase their security.
2. Security threats significantly affect the lives of European Jews: the participation of Jewish communities in their general societies is reduced and 41 percent of Jews aged 16-34 have considered emigrating from Europe because of anti-Semitism over the last 5 years.<sup>26</sup>
3. As a result of anti-Semitism and other factors, Europe's Jewish population is declining. If nothing is done, a significant number of European Jews will relocate to more hospitable environs; others will decrease their Jewish profile and distance themselves from Jewish communal life.

## Part 3: Anti-Semitism and the Western Liberal Order

Confronted with increased domestic and international instability, political leaders of Western democracies have become increasingly aware of the hidden motivations of various anti-system actors who disagree on all issues except the utility of Jew hatred. Many radical actors who target Jews as easy prey aim to destabilize the liberal world order.

Thus, in 2019, more Western democracies systematically committed themselves to legal frameworks to mitigate anti-Semitism. From Donald Trump's December 2019 executive order targeting anti-Semitism on US college campuses to Emmanuel Macron's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism that same month, and from the appointment of special anti-Semitism envoys in a series of Western countries to an unexpectedly unequivocal UN

report on anti-Semitism, we observe a change in confronting anti-Jewish hatred.

It appears that Western democracies have come to one or more of the following interconnected understandings: (1) Jews cannot mitigate anti-Semitism without state intervention; (2) those who viscerally hate the Jews likely also despise the liberal state; (3) Jews are perceived by anti-liberal actors as the epitome of the liberal state and attacking them is a way to undermine the liberal order. (4) Among anti-Semites are actors, sometimes supported by non-democratic regimes, who aim to destabilize Western democracies. Therefore, anti-Semitism is not just a social matter but a national security issue. (5) Confronting anti-Semitism requires top-level state intervention frameworks (legislative, juridical, enforcement, etc.).

## Part 4: Directions for Action

### 1 Recommendations to the Government of Israel

#### a. Establish an integrative body dedicated to combatting anti-Semitism.

The significant increase of anti-Semitism in Europe and the United States is a leapfrog phenomenon that reflects, among other things, the dissipation of the effect of the Holocaust on collective consciousness. It requires the Israeli government and major Jewish organizations worldwide to act at another order of effort as well as to adopt newer ways of thinking and modes of discourse than those of past decades. It is recommended that the Israeli government deal with anti-Semitism with an integrative body that has the authority and capability to carry out the task.

#### b. Create special programs for professions in high demand in Israel.

The fact that 41 percent of European Jews aged 16-34 are considering leaving their countries – and 67 percent of this group are contemplating emigration to Israel – should not be regarded with indifference. If Israel were able to provide tailor-made, attractive Aliyah programs, tens of thousands of European Jews might relocate to Israel. Structured employment programs should be launched similar to those designed in the past for engineers and physicians from

the FSU. In coordination with Israeli employers interested in hiring their graduates, these programs would involve early identification in France and Belgium and initial training in Israel.

### 2 Recommendations to Communal Leaders

#### a. Security training for young activists.

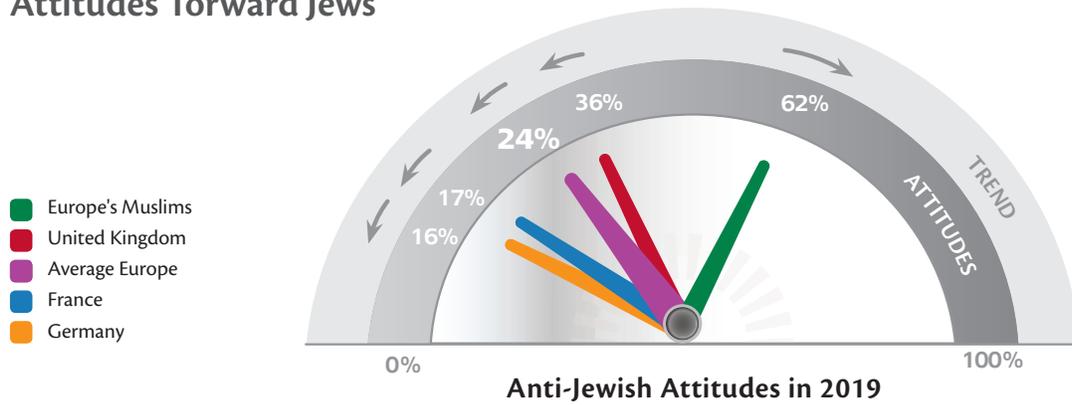
Projects should be created for training Jewish youth who wish to take a share of responsibility for the security of their communities. Twenty years of successful experience in France and UK has shown that a large number of young people who had been Jewishly unaffiliated have shown interest in being engaged in communal security, turning a threat into an opportunity for bolstering Jewish identification. It is notable that at one point the French youth organization, SPCJ, included more than 15,000 male and female Jewish youth who met regularly on holidays for training and provided professional security services to local synagogues and JCCs.

#### b. Interfaith programs.

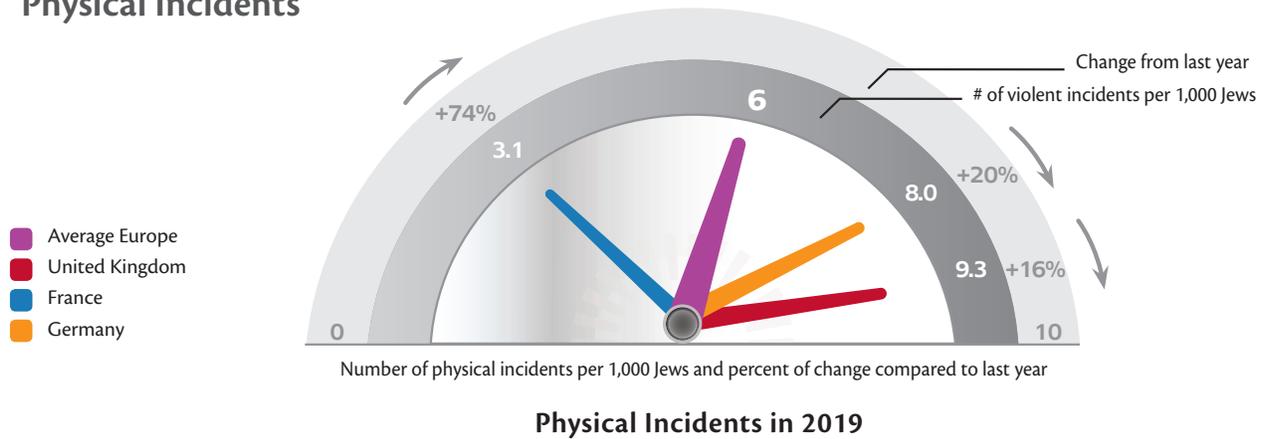
Hate crimes against synagogues, churches and mosques present the opportunity to build trust, long-term relationships, dialogue programs, anti-hatred educational programs, mutual understanding programs for youth, and interfaith coalitions against racism and xenophobia.

- c. Renew Black-Jewish alliances.** Blacks and Jews have a long history of cooperation, dating back to the beginnings of the civil rights movement and beyond. Communal organizations should take advantage of the increased awareness of racism to develop grassroots partnerships in the spirit of the 1913 ADL's mission to "stop the defamation of the Jewish people and secure justice and fair treatment for all."
- d. Security.** Watchfulness, forethought, and security action plans are fully justified under the current circumstances. At the same time, lay and religious leaders should take care that responses are consistent with the actual level of threat rather than presuming the worst. It is a fine line, but especially in America, Jews should refrain from taking measures that could be deleterious to the very bonds that have characterized their place in Jewish history.

### Attitudes Toward Jews



### Physical Incidents



### Perceptions among Jews



## Endnotes:

1. 2019 witnessed a rise of 18% in major violent cases compared to 2018 (456 cases in 2019 compared to 387 in 2018), seven Jews and non-Jews were killed, and a rise in most other manifestations, in most countries. At least 53 synagogues (12%) and 28 community centers and schools (6 percent) were attacked. An increase in life-endangering threats (47%) and in attacks on private properties (24 %). <https://english.m.tau.ac.il/news/antisemitism-report-2019>
2. "Canary Mission special report: Far-Right network behind Coronavirus antisemitism," *Canary Mission*, June 2020. [https://media90.canarymission.org/Campaign\\_PDF/corona\\_report\\_canarymission.pdf](https://media90.canarymission.org/Campaign_PDF/corona_report_canarymission.pdf)
3. Daniel Freeman and others, Coronavirus conspiracy beliefs, mistrust, and compliance with government guidelines in England. *Psychological Medicine*, 2020, pp. 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291720001890>
4. For a comprehensive review of the anti-Semitic incidents, classified according to geographic areas, profiles of perpetrators and motivations, see Yogev Karasenti, 2019 Annual Report on Antisemitism, *Israeli Ministry of Diaspora*, January 2020. <http://antisemitism.mda.gov.il/media/1810/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97-%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%99-2019.pdf>
5. Since January 2019 twelve additional OECD countries have adopted the IHRA working definition. See <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-and-charters>
6. Joseph Nasr, Riham Alkousaa, "Germany designates BDS Israel boycott movement as anti-Semitic," *Reuter.com*, May 17 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-bds-israel/germany-designates-bds-israel-boycott-movement-as-anti-semitic-idUSKCN1SN204>
7. Countries and bodies that have appointed special envoys, see 2019 Annual Report, *Israeli Ministry of Diaspora*, op. cit. p. 12.
8. Cnaan Liphshiz, "Jewish lawmakers who left Corbyn-led Labour over antisemitism return," June 20, 2020 *JPOST* <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/jewish-lawmakers-who-left-corbyn-led-labour-over-antisemitism-return-632155>
9. For a further discussion regarding a possible Jewish participation to the "Black Lives matter" movement, see in this 2020 JPPI annual assessment, the piece that relates to the JPPI's 2020 dialogue session.
10. Anti-Defamation League, Antisemitism Index, ADL Global 100 (2015), Executive Summary. <http://global100.adl.org>.
11. ADL Global 100 (2014) and update about 19 countries (2015), Anti-Defamation League, An Index of Anti-Semitism, Executive Summary. <http://global100.adl.org/>, PEW research center, Religion & Public Life, February 2017. [http://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/pf-02-15-17\\_thermometer-04/](http://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/pf-02-15-17_thermometer-04/)
12. 2019 Report on Anti-Semitism in France, *French Ministry of Interior and SPCJ*, <https://www.antisemitism.co.il/2020/03/2019-report-on-antisemitism-in-france.html>; The 2019 report on combating racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in France, *Commission nationale consultative de droits de l'homme (CNCDH)*, June 2020. [https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/essentiels\\_rapport\\_racisme\\_2019\\_format\\_a5.pdf](https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/essentiels_rapport_racisme_2019_format_a5.pdf); IFOP Survey, *Les Français et l'antisémitisme*, February 2019. <https://www.antisemitism.co.il/2020/03/2019-report-on-antisemitism-in-france.html>
13. Staetsky, L. D., 'Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain: A Study of Attitudes towards Jews and Israel', *JPR*, September 2017. <https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/7/4/JPR.2017.Antisemitism%20in%20contemporary%20Great%20Britain.pdf>

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14. *Bericht des Unabhängigen Expertenkreises Antisemitismus*, German Parliament, April 2017. <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/119/1811970.pdf>
15. See ADL 2015. See also Koopmans, Ruul, "Religious Fundamentalism and Hostility against Out-groups. A Comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe" WZB Berlin Social Science Center, WZB *Mitteilungen*, December 2013.
16. ADL. <https://www.adl.org/audit2019>
17. Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents: Year in Review 2019.
18. Community Security Trust (UK), Antisemitic Incidents Report 2019. <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/02/06/antisemitic-incidents-report-2019>
19. Source: Kantor Center - European Jewry and Antisemitism Database. [https://en-humanities.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities\\_en.tau.ac.il/files/media\\_server/humanities/kantor/Kantor%20Center%20Worldwide%20Antisemitism%20in%202019%20-%20Main%20findings.pdf](https://en-humanities.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities_en.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/humanities/kantor/Kantor%20Center%20Worldwide%20Antisemitism%20in%202019%20-%20Main%20findings.pdf)
20. Antisemitism Overview of data available in the European Union 2008–2018, *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, November 2019 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/antisemitism-overview-data-available-european-union-2008-2018>
21. AJC's 2018 Survey of American Jewish Opinion, <https://www.ajc.org/news/survey2018>
22. Ibid.
23. During the two last decades, more than 20% of the core community have already relocated in Israel. During 2012-2018, more than 25,000 French Jews (7.5% of the total community) relocated to Israel and thousands more migrated to the United States. This explains why the percentage of French Jews who are considering migrating has declined since the 2012 survey.
24. Ibid.
25. AJC's 2019 Survey of American Jewish Opinion. American Jewish Committee. June 2019. <https://www.ajc.org/news/survey2019>
26. Among the young European Jews (16-34 age) who investigate emigration, 67% contemplate emigrating to Israel, 21% to another country outside of Europe and only 11% consider remaining in a European country. "Young Jewish Europeans: perceptions and experiences of antisemitism," *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, July 2019. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/young-jewish-europeans-perceptions-and-experiences-antisemitism>

## 15

# Jewish Demography Index

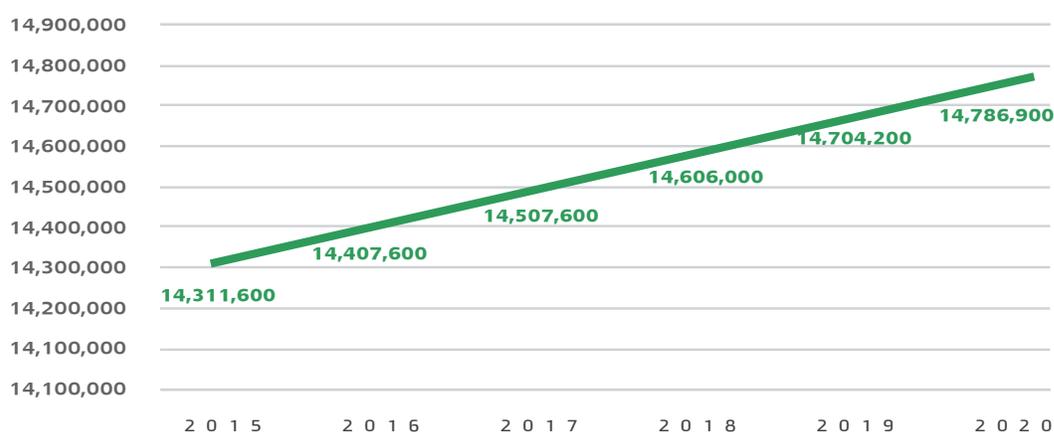
## Introduction

The Annual Assessment's Demographic Index presents data on the world Jewish population, main demographic trends, and inflection points or major events of the past year. This year, we naturally chose to emphasize the potential impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the social, economic, and political developments that it has sparked with regard to Jewish migration trends. Beyond the hard data, a fair number of the forecasts that appear here are, necessarily, informed guesses whose actualization should be monitored over the coming months.

## Numbers

At the beginning of 2020, the world Jewish population numbered close to 14.8 million.<sup>1</sup> This represents an increase of 82,000 over the previous year. A rise of 109,500<sup>2</sup> in the Israeli Jewish population factored into the overall increase, offset by a decline in the Diaspora population, some of which can be explained by relocation to Israel,<sup>3</sup> as well as a surplus of deaths over births (in the Diaspora). Since 2015, the world Jewish population has grown consistently by a hundred thousand per year, for a total of nearly half a million (or 3.3 percent) (Graph 1).

**Graph 1: World Jewish Population, 2015-2020**



Source: Sergio DellaPergola, *World Jewish Population, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020*. In: A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Books*. Springer

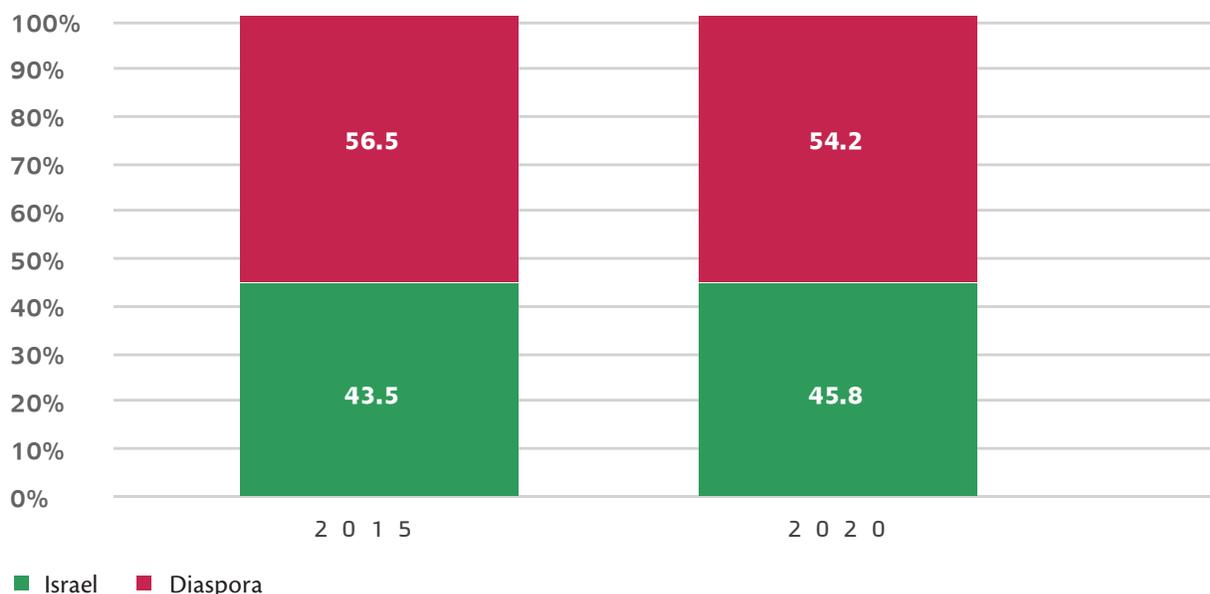
## INDICES

The Jewish population figures are based, for those living in Israel, on the Halachic definition of “Jew;” for residents of other countries the criterion is self-definition, so long as no non-Jewish religious identity is claimed. It should be noted that, apart from the latter group, a substantial population was identified in the US of people who have no religious affiliation but consider themselves full or partial Jews;<sup>4</sup> in most cases these are the offspring of mixed marriages.<sup>5</sup> We don’t know whether this is a phenomenon unique to the US, or if it exists in other Diaspora countries as well. One should also remember that, at the beginning of 2020, there were 447,000 olim (immigrants) and children of olim in Israel who were eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return but not Halachically Jewish.<sup>6</sup> Many of these people

are socially and culturally integrated into the mainstream Jewish-Israeli population (this group has grown from 357,000 in 2015 to the current number, a 25 percent increase).<sup>7</sup> Researchers and community leaders disagree about whether partial Jews, or “Law of Return” Jews (who have no other religious affiliation), should be considered part of the Jewish population.<sup>8</sup> If they are counted as Jews, the world Jewish population numbers 16.25 million.

Slightly over half (54.2 percent) the world’s Jews live in the Diaspora; 45.8 percent live in Israel (Graph 2). We estimate that, within a decade, there will be parity between the Diaspora Jewish population and the Israeli Jewish population. Israelis living abroad (600,000) are counted as part of Diaspora Jewry.

**Graph 2: Jews in Israel and the Diaspora, 2015 and 2020**



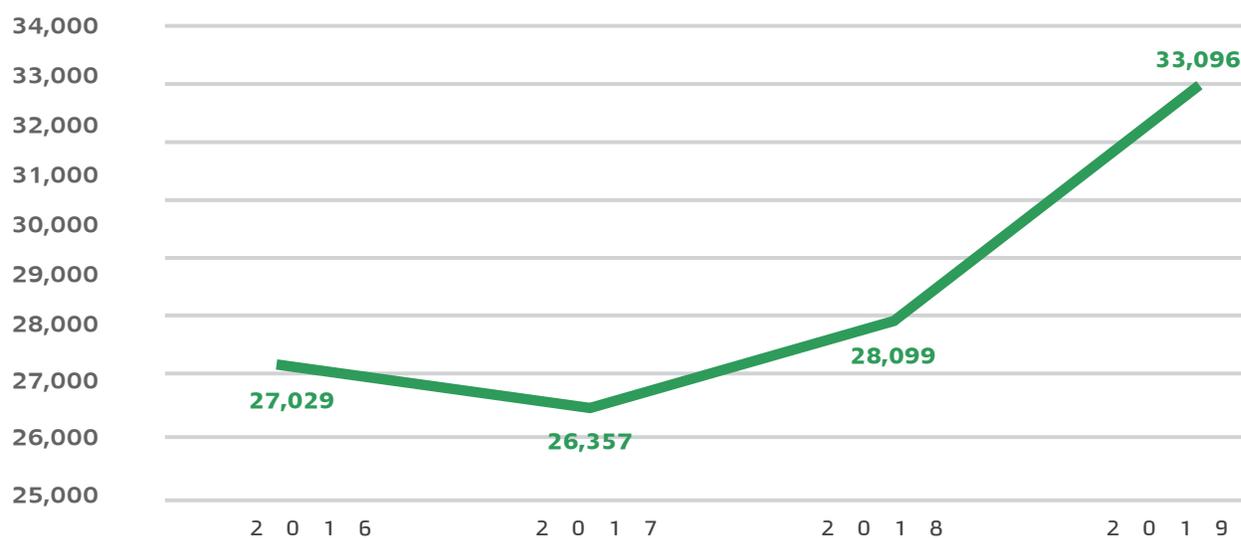
Source: Sergio DellaPergola, *World Jewish Population, 2016, 2020*. In: A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin (eds.), *American Jewish Year Books*. Springer.

## Aliyah

Last year (2019), 33,096 new olim arrived in Israel, a figure greater than the one for 2018 (28,099) (Graph 3). The majority of olim came to Israel from Europe (especially from Russia, Ukraine, and France); smaller but still substantial numbers came from the US and the UK. It should be noted that, overall, olim came from over 80 countries representing every continent on the planet. Fewer than half of those who

immigrated to Israel in 2019 were Jews (the rest were non-Jews with Law of Return eligibility).<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the trend toward greater Aliyah numbers reversed during the early months of 2020, presumably due to the coronavirus pandemic: over the first four months of the year (January-April), 6,384 olim arrived in Israel, compared to 9,166 during the same period in 2019.<sup>10</sup>

**Graph 3: Aliyah to Israel, 2016-2019**



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, 2020 (May)

## Fertility

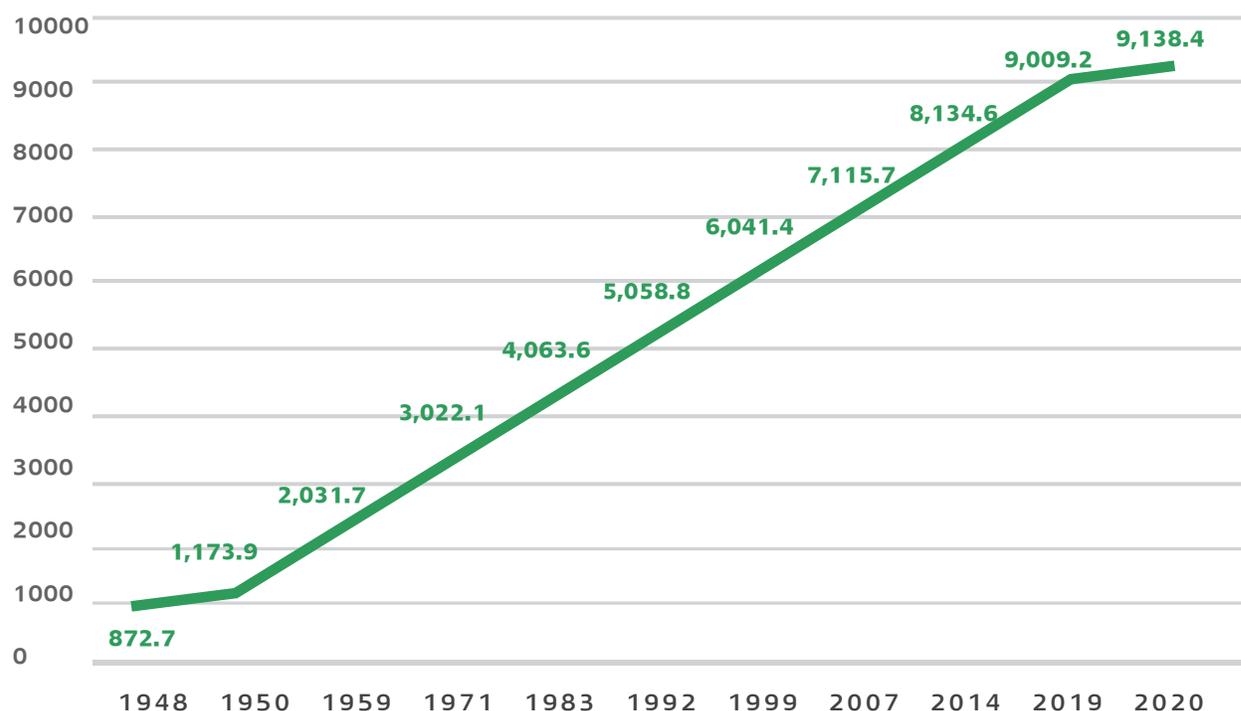
Jewish fertility outside of Israel currently amounts, on average, to 1.5 children per woman. However, one should distinguish between the exceptionally low fertility of the Jewish communities in the FSU countries (slightly greater than 1 child per woman), the 1.5 children-per-woman figure for North America, France, and Argentina, and the 2.1 figure for Mexico. Israeli fertility rates are much higher. During the period 2010-2014, the average figure was 3.03; this rose to 3.16 in 2016 and remained unchanged the following year. In 2018, it rose again to 3.17 (this is the last year for which there is available data).<sup>11</sup> Overall, the Israel-Diaspora ratio is 2:1 Jewish births.

Although this overview is concerned specifically with Jews, it is worth noting that, in recent years, the fertility gaps between Jews and Muslims in Israel have greatly narrowed, with the latter group's fertility rate now standing at 3.2. Israeli Christian and Druze women exhibit a lower fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman. The group with the lowest fertility rate in Israel is that of women with no religious affiliation (1.5 children),<sup>12</sup> reflecting in many cases the fertility patterns of their regions of origin in the FSU countries.

## The Israeli Population

Last year, Israel's population (Jews and non-Jews) crossed the 9 million mark (Graph 4). In November 1948, shortly after the founding of the state, the local population numbered 873,000. The one million mark was passed in early 1950, the 2 million mark in 1959, 3 million in 1971, 4 million in 1983, 5 million in 1992, 6 million in 1999, 7 million in 2007, 8 million in 2014 and, again, the 9 million mark was passed just recently. A larger population, combined with high fertility rates and positive net migration, is shortening the intervals between each additional million-resident milestone. Thus, while it took Israel 12 years to go from 2 to 3 million residents, it took only nine years to go from 4 to 5 million, and just five years to go from 8 to 9 million. Last year, 2019, the Israeli population grew by nearly 130,000. The Central Bureau of Statistics forecasts that Israel's population will reach 10.2 million by 2025.<sup>13</sup>

Graph 4: Population of Israel, 1948-2020 (in thousands)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, 2020 (May)

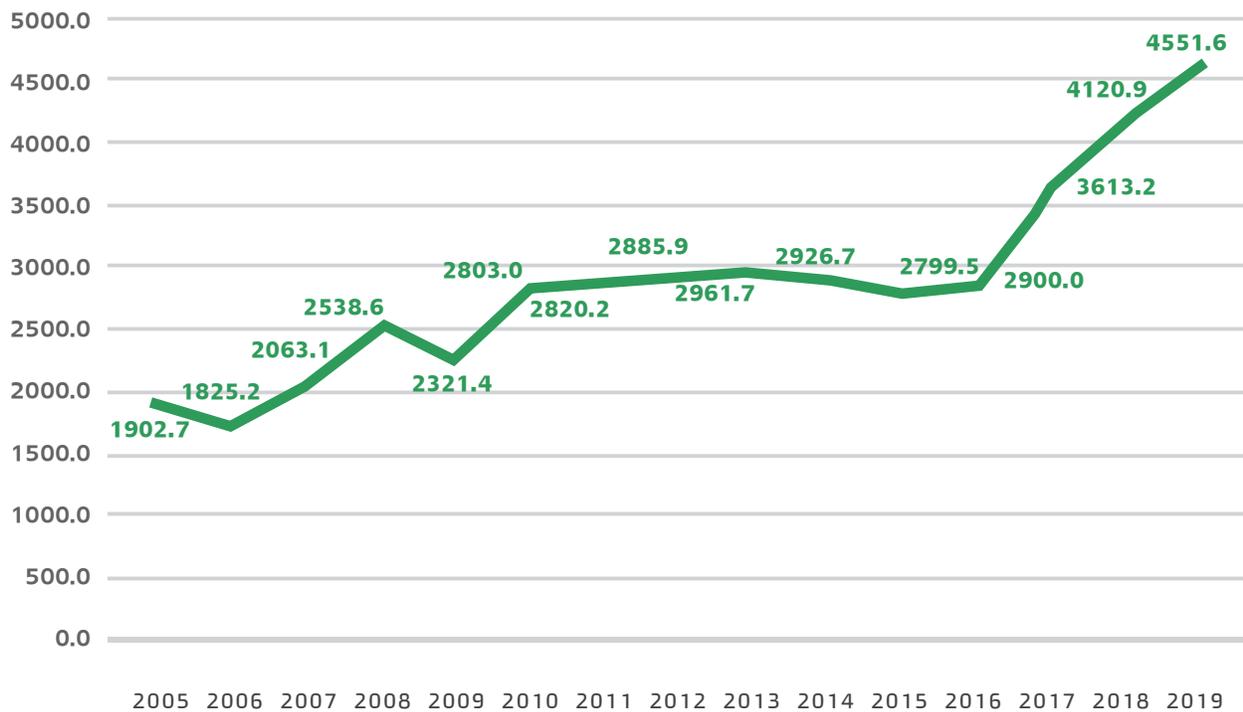
### Incoming Tourism

Israel's tourist arrival figures attest to high levels of interest in the country's history, society, and culture. There are also non-tourists who come for work reasons. Both groups increase state revenues and support tourism-related businesses: hotels, restaurants, Israeli airlines, and more. When Jewish tourists come to Israel, the experience strengthens their Jewish identity. When non-Jews visit Israel, the experience can bolster esteem and support for the state, which in turn promotes the dissemination of positive information about Israel and encourages others to visit. Over the past 15 years, there has been a very

consistent increase Israel's annual tourist arrival numbers (Graph 5). For the first two years of this period, the figure was less than 2 million, rising to 2-2.5 million during the next three years; from 2010 to 2017, the annual figure was 2.8 million tourists. In 2017, the number of tourists rose to slightly over 3.5 million; in 2018 the four million mark was passed, and 2019 saw the arrival of more than four and a half million tourists.

If we translate these figures, especially those of the last few years, into percentages, we find that Israel has enjoyed a more than 50 percent rise in tourist numbers since 2016. The past year alone witnessed a more than 10 percent increase.

Graph 5: Tourist Arrivals in Israel, 2005-2019 (thousands)



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*, January 2020, Table E/6

### Demographics and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our analysis and discussion of the main demographic trends for the past year (2020) is being written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic; it is too early to assess the pandemic’s impact on Jewish demographic patterns in Israel and the Diaspora. On the assumption that there will be no large-scale mortality with implications for Jewish life expectancies, the following four major demographic indicators should be monitored over the coming months:

- 1. Aliyah:** As noted, Israel’s new-immigrant numbers for the first four months of this year were a third lower than for the same period last year. In April 2020, only 430 olim arrived in Israel versus 2,300 in April 2019. It is likely that some prospective olim are merely postponing their arrival date and will carry out their immigration plans later in the year. Others may delay their Aliyah indefinitely, or cancel it altogether. At the same time, there

are forecasts calling for a significant increase in Aliyah to Israel as early as this year, on the order of 45,000 olim for a total of 90,000 by the end of 2021 (some of these predictions are based on Aliyah applications, or on numbers of people who have expressed interest through Aliyah offices). Many of the olim will be young adults in their 20s and 30s.<sup>14</sup> It is now too early to tell which of these two contradictory scenarios will come to pass, but it does seem as though Israel needs to prepare for larger numbers of olim than it has been used to in recent years.

2. **External migration from Israel:** The pandemic and its social implications, the unstable economic situation, and concern for elderly parents, along with what currently appears to be a more secure healthcare system than in many other countries, will keep more Israelis in Israel and reduce the external migration rate. Similarly, these considerations could also bring Israeli expats back to Israel, especially those who have not been abroad for very long and have no family or older children. The more severe the pandemic proves to be, the greater the duration of its impact on external migration and repatriation patterns. The Ministry of Aliyah and Integration needs to use this window of opportunity to try and attract Israeli expats back to Israel, and to help them find housing and jobs under today's less-than-ideal economic conditions.
3. **Tourism:** The COVID-19 pandemic caused a near-total cessation of international tourism. It is reasonable to assume that the crisis will persist until the end of the year, and even into the beginning of 2021. Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Tourism or other entities could support substitutes such as virtual tourism in Israel, which could provide a temporary alternative to real-life visits and a public relations platform for attracting tourists once the pandemic has passed.
4. **Fertility:** Crises and emergencies that keep people at home for extended periods can boost the birthrate nine to twelve months later. On the other hand, we have no past experience with situations similar to the coronavirus crisis, which featured lockdowns and restrictions on movement over a lengthy period, children home from school and in need of attention and activities, as well as economic uncertainty, including high unemployment rates. All of these could have an impact on family planning and actually result in delayed childbearing. In any event, it would appear, at this stage, that any change in fertility levels will be temporary.

Endnotes:

- 1 Sergio DellaPergola. World Jewish Population, 2020. In: A. Dashefsky and I. Sheskin (eds.), American Jewish Year Book, 2020 (forthcoming).
- 2 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. 2020. Monthly Bulletin (February).
- 3 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. 2019.
- 4 Pew Research Center. 2013. A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews.
- 5 Theodor Sasson. 2013. "New Analysis of Pew Data: Children of Inter-marriage Increasingly Identify as Jews." Tablet (November 11).
- 6 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. 2019. Monthly Bulletin (May).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See: Sergio DellaPergola. 2014. "End of Jewish/non-Jewish Dichotomy? Evidence from the 2013 Pew Survey." American Jewish Year Book, pp. 32-39; Leonard Saxe, Janet Krasner and Theodore Sasson. 2014. "Pew's portrait of American Jewry: A Reassessment of the Assimilation Narrative." American Jewish Year Book, pp. 71-81.
- 9 We are grateful to Marina Sheps of the Central Bureau of Statistics for providing us with these figures.
- 10 Central Bureau of Statistics. 2020. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, May 2020.
- 11 Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2019, Table 3.13.
- 12 Data taken from the Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2019, Tables 2.41 and 2.42.
- 13 Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2018, Table 2.10.
- 14 <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/772033>

# JPPI REPORTS

## 16

## The COVID-19 Crisis: Jewish Institutions are Rethinking Everything

The onset of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic crisis in early 2020 threw the world into a spin. Virtually overnight, travel shut down and people entered isolation and quarantine. Jewish communal life was forced to a grinding halt with many communities rushing to shift as much programming as possible to the digital sphere.

It is difficult to estimate how long the various restrictions will remain in place. It is likely that in the coming months, parts of the Jewish world will gradually begin returning to “normal.” However, this may be a “new normal” that is a hybrid of the pre-Corona era with elements of social distancing and online activity. As of this writing (June 2020), Israel has already begun this shift. Rabbis in the US are planning for the upcoming High Holidays, suggesting alternatives such as totally online prayer with new rituals that can be performed at home, hybrid online/in person prayer, or a modular format with a number of smaller prayer services staggered throughout the day and possibly throughout the week.<sup>1</sup>

We can assume that the longer restrictions remain in place, the more we can expect the Jewish world to be permanently changed to some extent.

The following is a summary and analysis of the ways in which North American Jewish communities have begun adapting to the COVID-19 crisis and the new emerging reality. Some of the adaptations relate to the pandemic and the need for social distancing, others to the resulting economic crisis – increased unemployment, and diminished philanthropic contributions and other revenues to Jewish organizations.

Many of the successful adaptations described are not so new, but rather connect to existing trends we have been observing on the margins of the mainstream Jewish community. We first described such trends in the 2019 Annual Assessment – “From the Margins to the Mainstream: Millennial American Jews and the Reorientation of the Jewish Middle.”<sup>2</sup> The full report will be published throughout 2020.

The 2019 report, in brief, explains that in recent years, established Jewish institutions have struggled to engage young adults (in their 20s and 30s primarily), while membership statistics and denominational affiliation have declined (among non-Orthodox Jews). This has led many

to declare a “shrinking Jewish middle.” However, while young adult Jews might connect less with denominational labels and less frequently hold membership in established organizations, they seem no less interested in engaging in Jewish behavior when defined more broadly. What we are seeing are generational shifts in Jewish behavior and identity rather than declines.

Young adult Jews are increasingly connecting to Judaism through innovative, often independent frameworks and organizations, including independent minyanim, emergent communities (the Jewish Emergent Network (JEN) comprises seven such communities), inventive projects operating from within the mainstream denominations, and thriving programs to engage young adults “where they are.” Taken together, we dub these an ecosystem of Jewish innovation. The reason for the relative success of these initiatives has been their early understanding and adaptation to these generational shifts.

We suggest that the COVID-19 crisis is not introducing these changes but is rather acting as a catalyst for existing shifts.<sup>3</sup> By tapping into these adaptations, we seek to offer guidance and insights to Jewish leaders to understand how to better navigate Jewish institutions as US Jewry and the broader American society undergo this generational shift.

### COVID-19 as Catalyst

It is not clear which Jewish organizations will survive the current tumult, and what changes they will have to make in order to do so. It would seem, however, that the longer the pandemic and economic twin crises continue, with limited physical and personal interaction, the more entrenched these changes could become. We can expect some activities to remain online permanently – those that have been deemed successful (perhaps lectures and other learning activity). But will prayer and spiritual activity return to the way they were or will all synagogues (post-Halachic) begin live-streaming services? Will there be irreversible Halachic changes regarding virtual minyans or the use of Zoom on Shabbat or holidays for the more liberal movements – Reform, Conservative and some of the more liberal Sephardic and Modern Orthodox groups?

The shift to online Judaism, even if temporary or partial, has, in many ways, “flattened” the Jewish world, according to *Forward* editor Jodi Rudoren, or “reshuffled” its borders.<sup>4</sup> A Jew in Jerusalem, London, New York or Los Angeles can just as easily participate in a learning activity, lecture, prayer service or discussion with Jews around the world as they do with those in their own community. For the curious, this opens many doors and could further erode many of the denominational divides that have been blurring over the past few decades. Could we end up with one large non-Orthodox denomination? After all, even before the “technical” merger between the Reform and Conservative movements, we

have seen a gradual shift whereby the Reform Movement has grown increasingly traditional and the Conservative less so. As synagogues in shrinking communities merge, and as umbrella organizations are now joining forces, might the COVID-19 crisis speed up this trend?

On the other hand, the availability of almost unlimited online Jewish content could speed up another trend – the one of hyper-individualization, of the Jewish experience expressed through a picking and choosing of various identity, ritual and educational components among young adult Jews. That is, the trend whereby Jewish communities decreasingly need to cater to a broad range of age groups, political opinions, and religious approaches within a single geographic area in order to maintain that community but where young Jews feel entirely comfortable creating or partaking in niche Jewish experiences that cater more specifically and “authentically” to their ideal.<sup>5</sup>

### A “Rethink” Approach

One of the major themes of this innovation ecosystem is the willingness to “rethink” or “reimagine” everything. That is, to broadly assess what has become outdated, and update or entirely remake it to better fit modern sensibilities. This spirit of innovation and openness has practical aspects but also conceptual elements. For these new initiatives, it is only natural to rethink things such as location or the lack thereof, building layouts, staff structures, and membership

and participation models. More than that, new initiatives can look into deeper matters such as affiliation, ideology, relationship to Halacha and tradition, prayer texts, as well as politics, positions on Israel, relations with the non-Jewish world and more. Even if the results are not so markedly different from existing institutions, the very process of questioning and choosing has an important aspect of deliberateness and intentionality, which many young Jews seek today.

Such organizations are at times more capable of pushing the envelope on often sensitive matters. They differ from legacy institutions that cater to an existing community with its traditions and norms, multiple generations and views, as well as denominational institutions that are expected to remain within certain boundaries, theological norms, or couplings of religious and political views. The new organizations often form around an individual or small group with a distinct approach and vision; those who appreciate that vision are welcome to participate. They make no claim to represent the broader community while coexisting within a larger community.

### Technology

The most obvious adaptation of the current crisis is the near full shift to digital platforms in all spheres of Jewish life, including those previously unimaginable. While online lectures and conferences are not new, they shifted from becoming an alternative to the sole means of convening.

Online learning was booming years prior to the current health crisis. Alongside a boom in Jewish learning in general, much of it was especially geared to engage audiences not versed in traditional, high-level Jewish learning. Orthodox groups like Chabad pioneered Jewish learning and Q&A platforms early on. The growth and popularity of podcasts has drawn new audiences to Jewish learning and subjects. Online projects like Sefaria have made the entire Torah (literally), Talmud, and major commentators available online in English (with simultaneous Hebrew), in a user friendly and searchable format. Project 929 has made daily Torah learning available to the masses, and Daf Yomi (daily Talmud study) thrives on digital platforms. Hadar launched a successful online “chavruta” study platform, Project Zug, where partners are matched together to study Jewish texts digitally as part of a larger curriculum. The Hartman Institute in North America launched its I-Engage program, in which its scholars teach communities virtually. There is little available data comparing online engagement during the pandemic with online or in-person interaction prior to the crisis. Hadar’s online platform, for example, saw 2.3 million downloads in 2019-2020, with engagement “skyrocketing” since mid-March 2020: engagement with their Facebook page rose 367 percent from the previous month. Livestream views saw a 500 percent increase. Hadar also reported that website traffic grew in this period, with Torah downloads going up 102 percent in the same time period,

prayer file downloads increasing by 58 percent and pageviews by 23 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish LIVE, an entirely online “Jewish community center,” sprang up almost overnight during the pandemic (launched by the creators of the popular Judaism Unbound podcast) and offers 25 hours a week of live Jewish content with thousands of subscribers in the United States, Israel, and around the world. In May, for example, its Facebook channel garnered more than 41,000 unique views, and another 13,000 viewers via Zoom and Vimeo, across all age groups.<sup>7</sup>

Shalom, an organization that engages primarily with young adults through Jewish cultural and educational programming in Sydney, Australia, noted a 113 percent increase in participation over the second quarter of 2020 compared to the previous year (comparing live event attendance to online participation during the pandemic, there were 2053 in person attendees in 2019 and 4373 online participants in 2020). Of note is a considerable uptick in participation of young parents from their homes.<sup>8</sup>

Prayer and ritual have also moved online, leading to an entire debate in its own right.<sup>9</sup> If the Reform and more liberal independent emergent communities had already adopted online prayer services to an extent prior to the crisis, the Conservative and Orthodox had to confront halachic limitations. Here we have witnessed divisions within the halachic world, with Conservative, some Sephardic, and a few Modern Orthodox rabbis allowing for prayers

requiring a minyan (quorum of 10) to be said virtually, provided that certain criteria are met (but not on Shabbat). In Israel, a handful of Sephardic rabbis (connected to the Chief Rabbinate) allowed (with much controversy) for those who would experience sorrow if they were alone on Passover to attend “Zoom Seders” with their loved ones as long as the computer was activated prior to the start of the holiday.<sup>10</sup> The use of digital platforms to facilitate a minyan, and prayers that may only be said with a minyan, has become a point of debate within the Orthodox world, in the US and Israel.<sup>11</sup>

It is still too soon to determine whether the increase in online prayer participation, given that in-person group prayer is largely unavailable, will continue after the pandemic. Such an increase, if it remains consistent, could have a significant effect. One Reform synagogue in the US, for example, reported that roughly twice as many people have been attending virtual Friday night services than had in person prior to the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

The use of technology for religious purposes during the pandemic brought to the fore discussions that were already well underway.<sup>13</sup> Several Reform synagogues and some of the emergent communities have live streamed services for years, especially during the High Holidays. If thousands attend in person, another few hundred might tune in from their homes. Lab/Shul hosts a “weekly Kaddish

call” in which people from all over phone in to say the Kaddish prayer with a virtual minyan. However, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism have refrained from doing so due to halachic considerations: electricity cannot be operated during Shabbat or Jewish holidays, and a minyan cannot convene virtually. In the course of our research, only three entirely online communities were found that conduct their entire communal life digitally. It seems, for the time being, while much has moved online, especially learning, people overwhelmingly feel the need to gather personally for prayer and socializing.

Some communities have taken advantage of technology to more easily design and publish their own prayer books (like The Kitchen in San Francisco), once the undertaking of denominational organizations or available only to wealthy congregations. Others have forgone printed prayer books altogether and employ video monitors with constantly updating prayers, mediations and visual displays (Lab/Shul in New York).

For some communities, technology has affected how they think about membership and payment. Sixth and I in Washington DC conducts its programming and payment via its website and has no membership per se. Such a model works for the community that engages exclusively with young adults.

## Space and Organization

Communities are also rethinking organizational concepts and the use of space. This has practical but also conceptual considerations. Real estate is expensive and membership fees are often high in order to support large buildings with staffs. Many synagogues and communal institutions are relics of an era when membership was the norm, and styles were opulent and passive. Synagogues were filled a few days a year and remained empty most other days. Financial difficulties and shifting membership and demographic trends have led some communities to fold, others to merge. Some of the Emergent congregations studied, and virtually all of the Independent Minyanim do not have permanent spaces, rather share or rent space from more established communities, of from churches and secular spaces on ad hoc bases – bars, cafes, parks, etc.

Some do this out of budgetary considerations. However, a number noted that there is more. Rabbi Noa Kushner at The Kitchen<sup>14</sup> (San Francisco) said were it too have access to such a budget, it would prefer to invest in hiring and placing outreach rabbis in the various neighborhoods of San Francisco where young, unaffiliated Jews live. Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum<sup>15</sup> of Kavana Cooperative in Seattle noted that the centers of gravity of Seattle Jews change from decade to decade, so the lack of a permanent building allows for nimbleness.

Rabbi William Hamilton<sup>16</sup> of Kehillath Israel outside of Boston (MA), an established

Conservative synagogue, invited minyanim and another synagogue community to partner with it in sharing its campus and infrastructure. The communities maintain independence where it suits them but cooperate and share resources when it benefits all sides. Thus, the campus can hold as many as five different styles of prayer service on a given Shabbat, each engaging the community in different ways.

Certainly, in a time where resources are tight, and more broadly when concepts of participation and attendance are being reimagined, communities will have to consider such issues, with these and other communities providing innovative models.

## Funding and Philanthropy

The funding of Jewish life has especially been challenged during these times.<sup>17</sup> As “membership” becomes less a mainstay, and the “pay per play” model popularized by Chabad becomes more prevalent, communities and organizations must rethink how to fund Jewish life. Technology has allowed for crowdfunding platforms to emerge, but these have not yet replaced the declines in traditional funding methods.

Jewish day schools are being hit first and hardest, with parents questioning if they should pay tens of thousands of tuition dollars for what can only be a partial online learning experience.<sup>18</sup> Can synagogue and JCC members be expected to continue paying membership fees, especially if

they are out of work? Funders are reported to have decreased contributions with philanthropies having to “triage” their giving. The Union of Reform Judaism (URJ) in the US announced it had laid off 20 percent of its workforce, after having to cancel URJ summer camps (a major source of revenue for the movement).<sup>19</sup> It later announced it was “merging” with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ), combining administrative and operational capacity in order to increase efficiency and remain afloat.<sup>20</sup>

### The Future of Denominations

The rise of these successful and independent institutions has called into question the future of the non-Orthodox denominations (Orthodoxy remains steadfast). The Conservative movement has especially seen a decline in affiliation and membership while, as noted, it recently announced a technical merger with the URJ to cut operational costs.<sup>21</sup>

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- 5 The various *Forward* essays are a part of a series on how the coronavirus crisis will affect the Jewish world. They can be found collectively here <https://forward.com/tag/after-corona/>
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- 7 Jewish Live engagement data provided to JPPI by Dan Libenson and Todd Brecher, of the Institute for the Next Jewish Future, which runs Jewish Live.
- 8 Data from Shalom Sydney is provided by Rabbi Alon Meltzer, program director at Shalom to the author. The authors are aware that Australia is not in North America, however the Australian Jewish community exhibits many similar characteristics to the North American community and faces many of similar challenges.
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## 17

## Religion and State in Israel Project: Seeking a Better Balance

A foundational project on religion-state relations in Israel is currently underway at the Jewish People Policy Institute. The goal of the project: to define and propose an improved outlook, model, and boundary lines for managing the interface of religion-state relations in Israel. The project specifically addresses a number of issues critical to the behavior of this interface, and explores the connections and tradeoffs between the relevant issues.

The project is headed by former Chief Justice Miriam Naor, a member of JPPI's Professional Guiding Council, and Brigadier General (res.) Michael Herzog with the participation of Dr. Inbal Hakman and Dr. Shlomo Fischer.

### Background

The State of Israel was conceived and established by its founders as a Jewish and democratic state. This definition encompasses both the state's Jewish character – as reflected in nationality, religion, and culture – and the fact that it upholds the principle of civil equality for all its citizens

regardless of religion, race or gender. In the 1990s, Israel, which lacks a formal constitution, enshrined fundamental civil rights in two Basic Laws: Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation, and Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. In 2019, additional legislation was passed that addresses Israel's national identity: Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People.

From the earliest years of Israeli statehood, there has been an inherent potential tension both between and within the two sides of the Jewish-democratic equation. Within Israel, there is internal tension between the Jewish majority and the non-Jewish minority, as well as between the different streams of Judaism. Beyond the state's borders, tension exists – and has grown in recent years – in the sphere of Israel-Diaspora relations (regarding such major issues as conversion and the state's attitude toward the non-Orthodox streams, as illustrated by the ongoing saga of the “Kotel compromise”). These tensions highlight the dilemma of how religion, nationality, and culture are apportioned within the concept of “Jewishness;” more specifically within the religion

component, the status of the non-Orthodox streams is a matter of concern. Another (and somewhat related) question is that of the balance Israel needs to strike between its “Jewish” and its “democratic” elements. The aforementioned issues are nationally, ethically/ideologically, religiously, and politically loaded in Israel, while in both Israel and the Diaspora they are perennial subjects of debate and central to the current discourse on Israel-Diaspora relations.

For years, efforts have been made in governmental and civil-society frameworks to address this tension and find ways of mitigating it. But in several spheres the tension has grown over time, for political, demographic, and other reasons.

### The project

At the heart of the project lies the question of what kind of balance is desirable, and possible, between Israel as a “Jewish state” and Israel as a “democratic state.” And relatedly: How can this balance be translated into everyday life in Israel? The assumption underlying these questions is that the unique character defining Israel’s identity as a nation, and the centrality of Judaism within that unique national character, representing a civilization of many different and interrelated elements, do not allow the tensions to be mitigated via separation of religion and state, as is the case in several Western countries, most notably the United States. We must, therefore,

seek the optimal means of fostering harmonious coexistence between the State of Israel and Judaism, with an emphasis on the religious element of the latter – itself a main source of social tension. Other central premises are that Israel, mainly due to domestic political pressures, has yet to identify the best way of striking such a balance; and that it must and can meet the challenge more effectively.

Much has been written about the desired religion-state balance. Israeli civil-society organizations have drawn up various “covenants” aimed at achieving such a balance (e.g., the Gavison-Medan Covenant, the Kinneret Convention, the Meimad-Lubotzky-Beilin Covenant). Many Supreme Court rulings have pertained to this balance. JPPI has also addressed the subject from a number of angles. Nevertheless, the Institute decided to take the issue up again, due to its great importance for Israel itself and for its relations with Diaspora Jewry, and out of concern over the directions in which it could potentially develop. The unique tools at JPPI’s disposal (a deep knowledge base, experience, and a wide-ranging network of contacts in Israel and the Diaspora) allow it to treat the topic with the seriousness it deserves. Former Chief Justice Miriam Naor, who heads the project, dealt extensively with the issue while serving on Israel’s Supreme Court.

The project aims to deal with both the forest and the trees. First it looks at the basic questions behind the Jewish-democratic tension, laying a conceptual foundation for discussion, and

from there it proceeds to address a number of core issues in which the religion-state tension manifests itself. These include:

- A. Conversion
- B. Marriage and divorce
- C. Shabbat and the public sphere
- D. Education
- E. Military/national/civilian service
- F. Kashrut

The state's attitude toward the non-Orthodox streams generally, and with regard to these issues in particular.

**The main questions addressed by the project:**

- A. The basic approach to defining religion and state relations in Israel.
- B. What are the minimal criteria for Israel as a Jewish state/state for the Jewish people, beyond which all citizens and communities can behave as they please? When defining the term "Jewish," what weight should be assigned to the elements of religion, nationality, and culture, and to the relations between them?
- C. How should the gateway to the Jewish people, and its relation to the gateway to the State of Israel, be defined?
- D. To what degree, if any, should the state provide religious services to citizens? Should these services be privatized and if so, to what degree, and how?

- E. Where should the balancing line be drawn on each of these core issues?
- F. What potential tradeoffs between these issues could prove helpful in reaching a comprehensive resolution for them?
- G. What should the Chief Rabbinate's status and powers be in such a resolution?
- H. How should the proposed solutions for achieving the desired balance be anchored or regulated – by legislation? Administrative decisions? Judicial oversight? Some other means?
- I. What would be the optimal mechanism for addressing these issues in Israel, and for handling Israel's relations with the Diaspora communities?
- J. How might Israeli decision-making on issues of religion and state be improved, so as to ensure greater reliance (to the extent possible) on comprehensive strategic thinking, rather than political pressure?

JPPI aims to define the balance, not just between religion and state, but also between the desirable and the possible in this context. Accordingly, it will take into account the constraints of Israeli public and political realities, and seek solutions that, rather than merely embodying inclinations or theoretical positions, actually have a chance of being realized.

Our impression at this stage of the project, now that a large number of interviews have been conducted, is that Israel's rich social mosaic,

and the Jewish religion itself, provide enough maneuvering space and flexibility for the tensions to be defused. Progress, however, is thwarted by political pressures, which set the tone in decision-making on religion-and-state issues at the national level. One of the project's main goals is, therefore, to delineate this maneuvering space and seek ways of putting it to use.

**Methodology:**

- A. Collect and study data from different sources, including governmental sources.
- B. Define guidelines, principles, and criteria for formulating positions on the core issues.
- C. In-depth conversations and interviews, based on focus questions that relate to each of the core issues, with prominent figures from the myriad sectors, streams and approaches (representing the religious streams from Haredi to Reform, the government, alternative organizations such as Tzohar, intellectuals, and more), to promote familiarity with a broad array of opinions and rationales.
- D. Based on these interviews and the principles formulated by the project team, we will draw conclusions and write the project report. The report will include analysis and policy recommendations, as well as a proposed mechanism for promoting and implementing the recommendations.
- E. Before the report and the recommendations are published, the project heads will hold meetings with relevant figures from the government and Diaspora Jewry to discuss the conclusions and recommendations and their likelihood of being implemented.
- F. JPPI intends to complete its work on the project by the end of 2020, and to present it to the Israeli government and other public entities in Israel and the Diaspora that are engaged with this topic.

## 18

## The Impact of Anti-Semitism on Jewish Identity: From Identity “in Itself” to Identity “for Itself” (Preliminary Report)

### Defining the Topic

The topic of JPPI’s 2020 Structured Jewish World Dialogue (the 7<sup>th</sup> of the annual series) is “The Impact of Anti-Semitism on Jewish Identity.” As is well known, both anti-Semitic attitudes and anti-Semitic acts have been on the rise in the United States. The aim of this Dialogue is to probe and assess the effect this is having on Jews in America, especially in terms of their experience of being Jewish in America and on their Jewish identity. Thus, to a certain extent we have discussed strategies of combatting anti-Semitism, and especially whether the Jewish community should join with other minority communities fighting racism in this struggle. Our interest in this was not so much to discuss operational strategies, but to get a sense of how Jews in America see themselves vis-à-vis other populations and how this affects their experience of anti-Semitism.

The description and analysis in this article is taken from two sources: an online questionnaire respondents completed in the course of the Dialogue sessions and statements that were expressed in the Dialogue sessions themselves.

Thirteen Zoom discussion sessions have been held with a total of 154 participants invited by Jewish federations and other organizations, such as campus Hillels. Although participants have spanned a wide range of ages, this year’s Dialogue included a very significant number of young people (ages 20-40).

### The Structure of Jewish Identity

Sociologists, such as Herbert Gans and Mary Waters, have formulated a concept of symbolic or optional ethnic identity for white ethnic groups in America (e.g. Americans of Irish, Italian, or Polish descent). By this they refer to the reality that white Americans can choose whether to display or emphasize their ethnic identity and culture – or symbols identified with it (e.g. food, music, holidays, dress) – or, on the contrary, choose not to display or reveal it. Many white Americans do choose to display their ethnic identity and its symbols on certain occasions as doing so can add color and interest to one’s life. American minorities of color

(non-whites), whose ethnicity is inscribed physically, have less choice or fewer options in regard to their identity. Other people can relate to them as Black, Asian, or Hispanic whether these wish them to or not. Jews participate in both forms of identity. The vast majority of Jews are white and hence enjoy a form of optional or symbolic ethnicity. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism means that others determine your identity whether you will

**Most respondents said that the rise in Anti-Semitism had somewhat shaken their confidence in the US, but that America “was still different.”**

it or not. If they attack you or discriminate against you because you are a Jew, then you are not the sole determinate of your own identity. In this sense, Jewish identity is more similar to Black or Hispanic identity.

### Rising Anti-Semitism

Eighty-six percent of JPPI’s dialogue survey respondents felt that anti-Semitism was more serious than it was ten years ago. This feeling is backed up by data. Over the last four years there has been a measurable rise in both anti-Semitic attitudes and incidents (see JPPI’s Anti-Semitism Index on pages 109 - 123). We inquired whether this rise in anti-Semitism, both in fact and perception, affected the feeling of security that American Jews feel in the United States. American Jews had long felt that “American is different,” that is, that American Jews did not suffer from violent

and aggressive anti-Semitism, as Jews in other places, such as Europe, did. Most respondents (61 percent) said that the rise in Anti-Semitism had somewhat shaken their confidence in the US, but that America “was still different.” Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that they had not considered moving to Israel.

### Responses to Anti-Semitism’s Rise

Europe had experienced rising anti-Semitism a decade or more before the United States. Jewish responses in Europe included downplaying or hiding one’s Jewishness as well as accentuating it. According to a European Union survey from 2018, 71 percent of respondents said they hide their Jewishness, at least occasionally. An alternative response is to turn away from the general society and turning inward to the Jewish community and strengthening one’s Jewish observance and commitment. This latter response is much harder to measure and our knowledge of it rests largely on anecdotal evidence.

We inquired as to whether these two responses also occurred in the United States. 46 percent of the respondents said that the rise of anti-Semitism has not changed how Jews express or present their Jewishness. However, 29 percent said that at least some Jews do attempt to downplay or hide their Jewishness, while 17 percent indicated that some Jews have become more assertive in expressing their Jewish identity. This second response was also expressed in the Dialogue sessions themselves. For example,

New York participants related how friends and acquaintances, who were generally indifferent to their Jewish identity, were motivated to attend the January 2020 Brooklyn Solidarity March against Anti-Semitism following the violent attacks against Hasidic Jews.

### Strategizing against Anti-Semitism

When we inquired as to the sources of anti-Semitism, 74 percent of respondents said that it was related to a general increase in racism. Accordingly, 95 percent also said that “the Jewish community would be well advised to form coalitions with other groups to combat racism.” Seventy-two percent said that Jews should even form coalitions to combat racism with groups with whom they have serious differences regarding other issues, such as Israel and Palestine. Some of the Dialogue sessions took place after the protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. In these sessions, many participants, especially the younger ones, spoke about their engagement with these protests and the connection with the struggle against anti-Semitism. This approach emphasizes what Jews and other groups, such as Blacks, have in common: they are both minorities and hostile outsiders impose their definitions of identity upon them.

### The Role of Israel

Dialogue participants understood our question about the role of Israel in combatting anti-Semitism on multiple levels. Some of them

responded that the State of Israel, as the Jewish state, should and can provide resources, funding, organization and the like to help on a tactical level in the struggle against anti-Semitism. However, many participants understood this question as referring to a more substantive level and discussed how the character of Israeli policy and society both contributes to and mitigates against anti-Semitism. Thus, some participants mentioned that Israel mitigates anti-Semitism, because it is “a beacon of democracy.” Other respondents, however, focused on how Israel contributes to anti-Semitism through its treatment of the Palestinians. In the Dialogue sessions themselves participants brought up the annexation of West Bank territories and said that such a move would contribute to a negative image of Israel and Jews.

### The Essence of Jewish Identity

Are we Jewish only because of anti-Semitism? To what extent is anti-Semitism constitutive of Jewish identity as Jean-Paul Sartre argued 75 years ago? That is to say, that we are Jews because others designate us as Jews and regard us with hostility. If they were to cease this hostility, we would cease being Jews and assimilate into being like everyone else.

When we raised this question in discussion groups, most participants said that there are many Jews that maintain their Jewish identity only because other people treated them as different and discriminated against them.

In that sense they said, anti-Semitism is “good” for Jewish identity (as the Talmud indicates). But almost all discussion participants, who for the most part were engaged and committed Jews, considered that a poor mode of Jewish identity. They insisted that a more worthy form of Jewish identity was one that rests upon the intrinsic meaning of being Jewish and the sense of fulfillment that Judaism gives to one’s

life. Furthermore, many participants said or implied that the truly adequate response to anti-Semitism was not only to fight it in the public and political spheres, but to increase one’s commitment to Jewish identity and Jewish learning. That is, one’s Jewishness should increasingly become “for itself” (*pour soi*) and be constituted self-consciously out of choice and rest less upon how others define and relate to Jews.

## 19

## Israel's Interests amid Increasing US-China Tensions

The growing confrontation between the United States and China has escalated in recent years – from a trade war to a technological one, then to a political war, and now to an ideological war as the US attacks China's domestic policy (Hong Kong, Xinjiang) as well as a "narrative war" over who is at fault for the spread of the coronavirus. For Israel, this confrontation has created dilemmas it has not faced outside of past differences of opinion with the United States related to the Middle East, or with other countries today. Not that America's displeasure with Israel's China links is new. In fact, China is one of the oldest – possibly the oldest – continuous bone of contention between the United States and Israel not linked to the Middle East. This brief paper is an update to an ongoing and long-term JPPI project regarding the relations between Israel, the Jewish people, and China.

### Fear and Pressure

The US fear of China has many aspects. In part, it stems from the fact that the United States has never faced such a formidable challenge to its economic dominance. Its main rivals in the past – Germany, Japan, the USSR – presented a military and ideological threat, and were defeated by military and economic means.

For the last two years, America's new concerns about Israel's China links have gone beyond the defense sector. They now extend to trade, Chinese investments in Israeli companies, and China's involvement in modernizing Israel's infrastructure (ports, subway and railway lines, and more recently Israel's largest desalination plant). According to the OECD, critical infrastructure in Israel lags behind other advanced

nations, and improving it requires significant investment. Chinese firms specializing in infrastructure development have been hired for these purposes, and in certain economic sectors, have no competition from other countries in terms of price and competence.

American concerns about China's involvement in Israel's economy add another dimension to previous concerns about Israeli-Chinese security cooperation (the American pressure that forced the cancelation of the 1999 Falcon spy plane contract is a prime example of this). Israel, unwillingly, finds itself caught in the middle of a tug-of-war taking place between the two greatest powers on the planet. American and Chinese observers describe the current situation as a mighty struggle between powers, perhaps even for global supremacy. American officials keep repeating that all Chinese companies are somehow linked to the Chinese government and the Communist Party of China. The US accuses China of dealing in unfair trade practices, committing intellectual property theft, and effectuating technology transfers through coercion or espionage. Intelligence agencies around the world have connected China to significant intelligence operations against the US and to cyber-attacks against Israel. The United States has also added cooperation between Chinese and Israeli universities as another area of concern. The United States claims that opening Israel up to Chinese investment and development endanger Israel and American interests.

The US, after all, has done more for Israel's security than any other country and is adamant that Israel stand by its side as it confronts China. At the same time, China has done nothing to assuage Israel's most serious strategic concerns. It supports Iran, including militarily, and seems indifferent to Israel's security.

The Chinese government claims its economic relationship with Israel is based on a "win-win" principle, where all sides profit, and that it has no ulterior motives. Accordingly, Israeli industrialists and those who oversee the industry and trade in Israel seek to protect their important economic ties with China. Of course, apart from interest in Israeli technology, China too has hidden agendas which occasionally appear in its media. China would like to present Israel as a model to other countries – that even America's closest friends can have beneficial relations with China.

### **Economics and Strategy**

In 2000 and 2004, when Israel had to break off its military relationship with China, nobody doubted who the world's only super-power was. Things are no longer so clear. China is catching up in future technologies, including those that are increasingly underpinning Israel's economy. One sign of this can be seen in the Chinese Huawei's 5-G technology, which skipped over the parallel American technology – apparently the first time China has developed such a transformative, paradigm shifting technology before the United

States. China could become a global competitor and even take the lead in developing certain advanced technologies (it set a goal to be a world leader in the field of Artificial Intelligence by 2030). Over time, such developments could affect the balance of power between the two superpowers.

Another important component of the changing geopolitical constellation is China's entry into the Middle East. Until recently, China has moved cautiously in the Middle East's shifting sands. Now, concordant Arab and Israeli sources report that the COVID-19 crisis is accelerating China's entry politically, economically, and even militarily. The Arab world does not share the West's hostility to China. On the contrary, it hopes China will help the poorer Arab states, Egypt and Jordan.

China seeks new areas of influence and is interested in developing naval and military bases in the Middle East in order to protect the flow of oil. Even Syria has drawn China's interest. China wants to participate in Syria's reconstruction and provides weapons to Assad. China will have to

resolve complex issues, including its competition with Russia, before its cooperation with the Arab world can bear fruit. But Israel cannot ignore that in due time it may have a new superpower in its neighborhood, China. What it needs is a regular strategic dialogue with China, similar to what it has with Russia. But this requires more American understanding.

Today, and for a long time to come, Israel's ties with the US (including American Jewry) will continue to greatly outweigh its ties with China. Therefore, Israel's policy challenge lies in promoting economic and civil ties with China without harming its strategic relationship with the United States.

Israel must remain sensitive to American policy, which may change with a possible shift in administrations in Washington in 2021. At the same time, and as it has already begun to do, Israel must strengthen its oversight on foreign investment. Moreover, the Israeli government must improve its knowledge base regarding China, which is insufficient for what will be required and expected in the coming years.

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## Gone Global: The Acceptance and Influence of Israeli Television in Foreign Markets

In recent years, technological and artistic changes have boosted television as an important and powerful cultural arena. Television has become digital and global, and the market is replete with series from a variety of countries and cultures. Israel, where for various reasons television broadcasting began significantly later than the rest of the Western world, is today a player in the global television industry.<sup>1</sup> The success story of Israeli television series is a new chapter in Israeli entrepreneurship, which is expanding into cultural fields. Numerous Israeli series are sold to foreign networks and broadcast all over the world. Two of the most prominent, “Fauda” and “Shtisel,” have enjoyed great international success (joining these recently was the series “Teheran,” which has been sold to Apple TV but not yet broadcast). The series reveal aspects of the Israeli reality to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences, and influence viewers’ knowledge and perceptions of Israel and their connection to it.

This article is a preliminary summary of a study that aims to describe the main aspects of this phenomenon.

### The Study: Questions and Goals

- A. What impact do Israeli series broadcast overseas have on:
  - Viewers’ knowledge of Israel;
  - Political and general opinions on issues related to Israel;
  - Attachment and connection to Israel;
  - Jewish identity.
- B. What is the nature of the main content and representations of the series? And how do the series reveal trends and changes in the social discourse about Israel and Israeliness today?

### Methodology

The study is based on qualitative analyses of the series themselves and of the articles and reviews written about them. Another main element of the study is taken from the posts and conversations in international Facebook groups devoted to “Shtisel” and “Fauda.”<sup>2</sup> These groups are lively and active with dozens, sometimes hundreds of posts published every month.

The largest group, “Shtisel – Let’s Talk About It” has over 20,000 members, while the smallest, “Shtisel Discussion Group,” has more than 3,500. The groups span the globe and have participants from the United States, Australia, Africa, Germany, the Netherlands, Israel and even – in the Fauda group – from Arab countries like Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia. (According to the Netflix “Top 10” list for the most recent month of Ramadan, Fauda was first in Lebanon, third in the UAE, and sixth in Jordan.) The groups constitute a data base of critical information and many hundreds of posts have been read and analyzed for the study.

A survey of 500 respondents (series viewers in the United States) was conducted on social media, particularly in designated groups related to Israeli television and series.<sup>3</sup> The sample is not representative of the American viewing audience generally or the American Jewish population in particular. Nevertheless, it does offer additional insight into series viewers active on social media. Most of the respondents were American Jews (83 percent), the others were American non-Jews.

### Initial Findings

**Knowledge and learning about Israel:** The Israeli series influence the viewers’ level of knowledge about Israel and their connection to it. In the Fauda Facebook group, one U.S. participant wrote that thanks to the series, he “met” Israelis and Palestinians for the first time in

his life and learned about the conflict between them. Another participant noted that she had learned a lot about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while another added that she experiences Israel and life there by watching the series. The following was written by a non-Jewish viewer of the series “Srugim”:

As an American, gentile (goy?), non-Hebrew speaking black person, I appreciate *Srugim* for giving me a window into a culture I would not otherwise have experienced... I appreciate *Srugim* because I got to see multi-faceted *dati leumi* going about daily life in Jerusalem. A plane ticket from MSP [Minneapolis] to TLV is \$1,900, so my subtitled DVD is the only place I would have been able to experience this world. On one level, I watched the acting and stories as entertainment, but I also watched as education on Israeli life, religion and pop culture. I mean, I know it’s a TV show not a documentary, but still...

“*Srugim*,” a fairly early series, aired in Israel from 2008-2012 and has been in US distribution since 2014.<sup>4</sup> It is still available (on Amazon Prime and Hulu) and has gained popularity. Its Facebook page is very active and many of the participants in the other groups mentioned in the study recommend it as one of the best Israeli series available. The quotation above exemplifies how series serve as a channel for learning and a kind of “voyage” to Israel.

**Reinforcing Jewish identity:** For Jews, the Israeli series represent more than a “voyage of discovery” in regard to Israel. For some, the connection to Israel is a central component of Jewish identity, and therefore **the TV series meet a Jewish-identity need.** For Jews who strive for a significant connection to Israel in their daily lives, the series represent a convenient “opportunity” to reinforce this connection. Compared to other ways of expressing the connection to Israel, such as visiting and having homes there, the advantages of watching the series are clear. Watching a TV series rests upon a significant basis of enjoyment and fascination and can provide emotional catharsis. The Netflix revolution offers easy, inexpensive access to them on American channels. As various Facebook group participants attested, the series allow them to “jump” to Israel on a weekly, and sometimes daily, basis. One participant in the Facebook group put it this way:

I think that watching Israeli television shows connects people to Israel. For those who have visited there, they see sites that they’d seen while there. For those who have not been to Israel, it excites them to want to visit to see it first-hand. I think it sparks the Jew in everyone and brings them closer to their roots.

Further evidence of the implications for identity reinforcement is the principle: **“any show as long as it’s Israeli.”** The principle is simple: viewers tend to intentionally choose Israeli shows

selectively, that is their primary interest in any given series is connected to its being Israeli. This principle held as a prominent finding both in the survey and in the Facebook fan groups. Numerous posts reflect a consistent pattern in this vein: expressing enthusiasm for one Israeli series and then soliciting recommendations for other Israeli programs. Even when the phrasing is more general, for example, a recommendation for a similar series, the responses mention other Israeli series almost exclusively. Furthermore, most survey respondents reported having watched or currently watching more than one Israeli series. In other words, this is not a choice based on theme or genre but rather on being Israeli and dealing with Israeli society. Most Shtisel viewers said they also watched Fauda. These two series are very different from each other, which strengthens the argument that the common interest in them derives mainly from their Israeli provenance.

**Israeli television and connection to Israel among different Jews:** In the following chart, based on data from the survey, one can see that watching Israeli television series has the effect of strengthening attachment to Israel (among American Jewish viewers). The chart relates to four groups of Jews with different levels of connection to Israel. In the first group are Jews with a very strong attachment to Israel; in the second, Jews who have a strong attachment; in the third those with a weak attachment; and in the fourth, those whose attachment is very weak. The division of the respondents into the different categories

was made according to an index of connection to Israel, based on the sum of the respondents' answers to questions about Israel: concern for Israel as a component of my Jewish identity (30%); level of knowledge about Israel (30%); number of visits to Israel (30%); residence in Israel (10%). The chart

shows that a positive impact – a strengthening of the connection to Israel as a result of watching – becomes more evident the stronger the connection to Israel was to begin with. In the study, we will seek to further examine the impact watching the series has on different groups of Jews.

### The Effect of Watching Israeli Television Series on Attachment to Israel among American Jewish Viewers

Connection to Israel	No comment	Not at all	To some extent	To a great extent	Total
Very weak	48.4%	12.8%	10.4%	2.2%	9.30%
Weak	25.8%	23.4%	15.0%	6.2%	12.50%
Strong	9.7%	23.4%	33.7%	30.1%	29.60%
Sery strong	16.1%	40.4%	40.9%	61.5%	48.70%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%

For non-Jews, the Israeli series are a means of discovery and learning about Israel and the Israeli reality. For Jews, the series are also a cultural channel for strengthening both Jewish identity and attachment to Israel. In the full study, additional data on the series' impact

will be presented and aspects of and changes in Israeli society that the series uncover will be examined. In this sense, the series are also an inward-facing mirror and a catalyst for contemporary trends in Israeli society.

## Endnotes:

- 1 Television for general audiences only launched in Israel in the 1960s, compared to the late 1930s – Mid 1940s in the West.
- 2 The groups are: “*Shtisel* – Let’s Talk About It,” “Shtisel Discussion Group,” “Shtisel Addicts,” “Fauda” (Fan discussion group)
- 3 The poll was published on a number of Facebook groups related to television series in general and to those of the Israeli series, Shtisel and Fauda. Similarly, it was disseminated in a number of academic groups unrelated to television, as well as among friends and acquaintances in the United States.
- 4 *Srugim* was first broadcast on the Yes Stars channel on Israel’s Yes satellite network, and the first series also aired on Israel’s Channel 2. Its second season was broadcast on Yes in 2010 and later also on Channel 10.

# CULTURAL CURRENCY

## 21

## Traumas Present, Traumas Past

### Literature, Television, Film, Theater, Art

The COVID-19 crisis has not left culture unscathed. One after another, cultural institutions in Israel and around the world have closed. Numerous artists have been forced to deal with the severe economic fallout the crisis has caused. Yet, new ways of creating and consuming art have also been found. As in other areas of life, culture too has shifted to another format. Writers' meetings on Facebook, virtual tours of museums and live music shows have proven that the public does not readily give up on culture.

Last year's Assessment emphasized television's centrality as a major cultural medium in the present era. Streaming and VOD technologies have wrought real change in how television is consumed and have boosted its artistic and cultural standing. The coronavirus further underscored this state of affairs. We can expect that technology's penetration into the art world will continue in the near future and will influence how culture is created and consumed.

#### Crisis within a Crisis

For many of those Israelis engaged in culture, COVID-19 is nothing but a crisis within a crisis. Some of the institutions and branches of the cultural market in Israel felt the rope tightening around their necks even before the health crisis. This, for example, was the situation for the national theater, "Habima." Shortly before the crisis broke, it was revealed that the theater had accrued a deficit of almost 100 million shekels (\$29 million). There was genuine fear that the theater would collapse. But after an orderly rehabilitation plan – including a settlement with creditors – was put in place, the COVID-19 crisis erupted and undermined the plan.

The economic difficulties have brought with them growing criticism of the content performed in the theaters. Many people of culture believe that the repertory theater in Israel has lowered the standard of its productions in order to fill its coffers. Those who manage the various stages prefer to put on entertainment shows and musicals and not to invest in quality productions or in theater with biting messages.

Publishing in Israel has also suffered from the economic crisis. For years, young authors have been forced to pay a portion of the publishing costs of their books. The publishers face difficulty dealing with declining readerships and struggle to sell books, especially those by unknown authors. Small bookshops are fighting for their place against the large chains, and all were shuttered during the COVID-19 crisis, with some sustaining very heavy damage.

### The Return to Lebanon

This year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the IDF's withdrawal from Lebanon after a presence there that gave rise to quite a few important cultural works and influenced an entire generation of Israelis who served there as soldiers. Ahead of this anniversary, the documentary series "War without a Name" was broadcast on Israeli television (*Kan*, Israel Rosner and Mati Friedman, 2020). The series deals with the Israeli presence in Lebanon from the end of the First Lebanon War in 1982 until the withdrawal in May 2000. A very long period of tough and debilitating battle that was never defined as a war. The series examines the main events in the process of becoming mired in the Lebanese mud, and aroused much interest.

In December 2019, a few months before the series was broadcast, a book by the journalist Haim Har-Zahav was published: *Lebanon: The Lost War*. It describes the military presence in Lebanon from the standpoint of the fighters, as well as the protest movement against it.

As shown in the series, Har-Zahav's book decries the omission of the war from the official record, and the refusal to recognize the long years of combat as a war. Simultaneously with the documentary works about the war, an active Facebook group, "Stories from Lebanon – What Happened in the Outposts," began and grew rapidly. Created by the director, Eyal Shahar, the group has almost 36,000 members, all of them soldiers who served in Lebanon. Through Facebook, they share moments from the past, descriptions of heroism and pride, but also difficult moments of terror and trauma. Following the public discourse, the outgoing Defense Minister Naftali Bennett announced the establishment of a special team to consider awarding a special decoration to combat soldiers who served in Lebanon.

Lebanon was fertile ground for Israeli creativity. For example, "Waltz with Bashir" (Ari Folman, 2008) and "Lebanon" (Samuel Maoz, 2009) deal with the First Lebanon War. Both films offer unique cinematic expression that sharpens the intensity of the soldiers' trauma and the continuing difficulty in telling the story. Foman weaves segments of animation into his docudrama and, in fact, all the memories of Lebanon are animations. In an interview, he said that without animation, he wouldn't have been able to create the film or to deal with the Lebanese sore. Most of Maoz's film (except for its opening and closing scenes) was shot inside a tank; exterior views are shown through the

tank's gun sight, an artistic choice that expresses the claustrophobic pressure and the trauma its crew, and the director himself, experienced. Ron Leshem's 2005 book, *Beaufort*, is another prominent work based on the Lebanon experience. It deals with the final months of the Israeli presence in Lebanon and describes the lives of the soldiers assigned to Beaufort Castle, who are preoccupied with the question of who will be the last to die in Lebanon. Joseph Cedar's film, "Beaufort" (2008), a cinematic adaptation of Leshem's book, describes the claustrophobic atmosphere in that isolated position.

National traumas and wounds are recurring themes in Israeli culture. Yaron Zilberman's 2019 film "Days of Awe" deals with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>1</sup> It describes the events leading up to the murder from the point of view of the assassin, Yigal Amir. The film, retitled "Incitement" for its international release, won the 2019 Ofir Prize for best drama and was nominated as Israel's entry in the best international film category of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards.

The television series "Our Boys" (2019) by Hagai Levi, Joseph Cedar and Tawfiq Abu Wael (a co-production of Keshet International and HBO) also deals with trauma. The series opens with the kidnapping of Israeli teenagers Gilad Shaer, Naftali Frenkel and Eyal Yifrah in the summer of 2014 (the onset of the events that culminated in Operation Protective Edge in Gaza), and continues with the kidnapping and murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, an Arab youth whose death was planned to avenge the Jewish boys' murders.

Unlike the works previously mentioned here, "Our Boys" generated a complex public reaction in Israel. The film was condemned by both the right and the left. On his Facebook page, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the series anti-Semitic, and various critics on the left claimed that it was too forgiving of the Jewish murderers and did not adequately describe Palestinian suffering.<sup>2</sup> The series name, "Our Boys," aroused anger among viewers who believed that it would deal exclusively with the kidnap and murder of

the three Jewish boys.

The fact that the series was made in partnership with HBO and was marketed in the United States raised questions. Some claimed that the foreign viewer cannot understand the

conflict's complexity and that, for this reason the series plays into anti-Israel and anti-Semitic hands.

The series won the appreciation of the judges at the Israeli Television Academy ceremony, earning 14 prizes, including for best series. The Arab actors, Ruba Blal-Asfur and Johnny Arbid, boycotted the ceremony because it was held on Israel's Independence Day (which they mark as Naqba Day, after the Palestinian "calamity"). Blal-Asfur, who refused to accept the prize, condemned the event.

**National traumas and wounds are recurring themes in Israeli culture. 20 years since Israel left Lebanon, it remains a fertile ground for Israeli creativity.**

## Lindbergh and Trump

In March and April 2020, HBO broadcast “The Plot Against America,” a six-part mini-series adaptation of the late Jewish author Philip Roth’s famous book. The series was produced by David Simon, himself one of the most important television creators in the Jewish world. The story is told from the point of view of the Levin family of New Jersey, which is portrayed in the image of the Roth family, and describes a fictional world in which the aviator, Charles Lindbergh, who identified with the Nazi movement in the 1940s, is elected President of the United States instead of Franklin Roosevelt.

**Simon emphasized the link between the fictional events Roth described and the situation in the US today.**

Following the election, the United States becomes fascist and virulently anti-Semitic. The series, like the book, won plaudits. In various interviews, Simon emphasized the link between the fictional events that Roth described and the situation in the United States today (rising anti-Semitism and xenophobia). Simon even compared Trump to the Lindbergh character in the book and the series, a comparison many American Jews accept. There are, though, other voices too in the Jewish discourse. Prof. Ruth Wisse, in a lecture on liberalism and anti-Semitism, rejected Simon’s comparison as erroneous and misleading.<sup>3</sup> To her, the focus on Trump and movements on the right is mistaken and that the true danger to the

Jews comes from the liberal left that works to delegitimize Israel and Zionism.

Another notable series dealing with Jews in the United States was “Unorthodox” (Maria Schrader, 2020), the first Netflix production in Yiddish. The series is based on the true story of Deborah Feldman who was raised in Satmar Hasidism in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and later disavowed it.<sup>4</sup>

The series, which stars the Israeli actress Shira Hass (nominated for an Emmy Award) and features a large cast of Israelis and was shot in New York and Berlin, describes the difficulties of disconnecting from a closed Haredi society. It also has a feminist angle, of course, which corresponds with another series, “Miss America,” which portrays the struggle of feminists, most of them Jewish, in 1970s America. For more about the series, see page 176.

Reactions to “Unorthodox” have varied. Some of the most interesting came from within the Haredi world, like that of Rachel Freier, a Haredi judge from Brooklyn. Freier stated that the series distorts the Haredi reality, with its emphasis on sexual relations.<sup>5</sup> Her reaction was similar to previous cases in which Haredi leaders reacted to works that deal with the community from the outside. An exception to this is “Shtisel,” which features strong and opinionated Haredi women without explicit sexual content and was more sympathetic in its portrayal of daily human life

in the Haredi world. Of course, any comparison between the two series must take into account the differences between the two communities

they portray, the Satmar in Williamsburg versus the Haredim of Geula neighborhood in Jerusalem.

# MILESTONES OF JEWISH CULTURE 2020

## CONTROVERSY: WOODY ALLEN

This year saw the publication of Woody Allen's autobiography, "Apropos of Nothing." The book's publication was an important event, both in light of Allen's stature as a multitalented director and comedian, and because of the controversy it aroused. The 85-year-old Allen has contributed much to American and world cinema, as well as to American Jewish creativity, and the book describes milestones in his singular career. At the same time, a significant portion of Allen's book seeks to defend his innocence of the charges of sexual abuse leveled against him by his daughter, Dylan

Farrow, in 1992. Because of this episode and in the face of a severe protest by its workforce, Hachette Book Group pulled out of the deal at the last minute and it was instead published by another press, Arcade. Although Allen proclaims his innocence in the book, the wind has been mostly against him in his public and professional battle. Allen can no longer distribute his films in the United States and many universities have cancelled courses on his work. In this sense, the book and the protest against its publication demonstrate the power of the "Me Too" revolution in the United States.

## DRAMA: YEARNING

This year, the Gesher Theater in Israel staged the play "The Wanderers," by the American-Jewish playwright Anna Ziegler. It tells parallel stories about the lives of two New York couples. The first couple, Abe and Sophie, are secular American-Jewish authors. The other couple, Schmuli and Esther, are Haredim from the Satmar community of New York, who marry by *shidduch*

(an arranged match). The deep connections between the two couples quickly become clear as they are, to an extent, the mirror image of each other.

Through the personal stories of the characters, the play seeks to decipher the meaning of the idea of “yearning.” It adopts a concept according to which Judaism is a type of yearning, in the sense of a deep and irremediable lacking.

Echoes of this idea are common in the works of American-Jewish authors of past generations such as Delmore Schwartz, Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, as well as among contemporary authors like Jonathan Safran Foer, and Nicole Krauss. The idea of Judaism as “yearning” is tied to the Diaspora and the deep longing for Jerusalem. Israeli Judaism, which has been shaped in the Israeli space, is no longer bound up with longing for a far-off place. The play, therefore, enabled its Israeli audience to encounter a different Jewish cultural viewpoint.

## REMEMBRANCE:

# KIRK DOUGLAS

American-Jewish actor Kirk Douglas died this February in his Beverly Hills home aged 103 (1916-2020). Douglas was one of the most well-known and successful actors in Hollywood and appeared in dozens of films in an impressive career that began in the 1940s. As an actor, he was nominated for an Academy Award three times and won an honorary Oscar in 1996 (“for 50 years as a creative and moral force in the motion picture community”), as well as a Golden Globe for lifetime achievement in 1968. He played in classic movies such as “Spartacus” (1960) and “Lust for Life” (1956), as well as in films about Israel, like “The Juggler” (1953) and “Cast a Giant Shadow” (1966), in which he portrayed the character of David Marcus, the first general in the IDF and a colonel in the U.S. Army, who came to Israel to help with the War of Independence and was mistakenly killed by a junior soldier. Douglas was considered an enthusiastic supporter of the State of Israel and donated regularly to various institutions and projects in the Jewish state. At last year’s Golden Globes ceremony, where his son, Michael Douglas, won the Best Actor award (for his performance in “The Kominsky Method”), his son dedicated the prize to his father and declared in Yiddish: “Alte kakers rule!”

## Endnotes:

- 1 It is interesting to note that Ron Leshem was also among this screenplay's writers.
- 2 See, for example, Koby Niv's review in *Haaretz*: "Our Boys' is a perfect example of a terrible lie." October 20, 2019.
- 3 Wisse, Ruth, "Can Liberals Confront Anti-Semitism?", March 31, 2020, the Tikvah Fund: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=201467144489450>
- 4 The series was based on her autobiographical book, *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*, Simon and Schuster, 2012.
- 5 Nitzan Keidar, *Arutz 7*, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/279835>.

## 22

## Talmud vs. Kabbalah

### Religion, Theology, History, Philosophy, Sociology

What should the nature of modern Jewish religious culture be? To what extent should it center around the traditional normative sources of Talmud and Halacha? Should it also have room for, or even focus on, non-Halachic sources such as Aggadah and Kabbalah and even heterodox, antinomian streams? The latter may be more relevant to contemporary secular society.

#### Siyyum HaShas – Daf HaYomi

In August 2020, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Even-Yisrael) passed away at the age of 83. R. Steinsaltz, an Israel Prize laureate, was most noted for his innovative “Steinsaltz Talmud,” a Modern Hebrew translation of the entire Babylonian Talmud. In addition to his work on Talmud, Steinsaltz also authored books on Kabbalah, Hasidism and Hasidic stories, as well as commentaries on Tanach and Mishnah.

Steinsaltz, above all, was concerned with the Jewish literacy of the general Israeli public. His groundbreaking translation of the entire Babylonian Talmud (with commentary) made the

Talmud accessible to a wider public. In addition to a running modern Hebrew translation, the Steinsaltz Talmud also includes other features designed to illuminate the Talmudic discourse, such as annotations explaining the various historical figures, objects, plants and animals that appear in the Talmudic text.

The Steinsaltz Talmud has played a significant role in widening the circle of those studying the Talmud in religious and traditional communities, which in recent decades have shown remarkable vitality. The 13<sup>th</sup> Siyyum HaShas (completion of the Talmud) by the participants in the Daf Yomi (daily page) project was celebrated on January 4, 2020 with mass participation in both Israel and the Diaspora. The Daf Yomi project was proposed by R. Meir Schapiro and R. Moshe Menahem Mendel Spivak of Poland in 1923. It consists of studying one folio leaf (both sides of the page) of the Talmud each day according to the order of the tractates. All participants in the project study the same page each day and after seven and a half years, they complete all 2,711 folio pages of the Talmud.

Recent years have witnessed growing participation in the project in terms of both numbers and geographic distribution. It seems that almost every community has a Daf Yomi study group today (in Israel, the United States, Europe, Latin America, Australia, and South Africa). Undoubtedly, publishing and technology innovations have greatly contributed to this growth. The Talmud is now accessible to larger populations than ever before. The ArtScroll Schottenstein Talmud with its user-friendly running commentary (it is basically an expansion and paraphrase of R. Shlomo Itzchaki's [Rashi, 1040-1105, France] classical commentary,

**In the Haredi sector, the increasing prominence of Daf Yom signifies the transition from a small elite society to a mass society.**

and illuminating footnotes is widely available in English and Hebrew. In addition, there is a plethora of Daf Yomi internet classes and podcasts in almost every language and on every level of Talmudic expertise in addition to the

classes scheduled in almost every community, either early in the morning or at night.

Thus, what had been a rather esoteric phenomenon has turned into a mass participation event. Ninety-two thousand people participated in the Siyyum Hashas sponsored by World Agudath Israel in the Met Life Stadium in New Jersey and mass participation events were held in the Jerusalem Conference Center and other locales in Israel.

Ever since the rabbis of late antiquity (*Chazal*), Jewish culture has pressed forward the ideal of equal access to the realm of the holy, especially that of sacred texts and knowledge. It has not restricted Torah knowledge to a hereditary caste such as the priests, but on the contrary has regarded it as the "inheritance of the house of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4). Almost every technological and cultural innovation has been pressed into the service of this ideal. Today, this ideal is not only advanced, as we have seen by technological and publishing innovations, but intersects with other contemporary social and cultural trends.

In the Haredi sector, the increasing prominence of Daf Yom signifies the transition of the Haredim from a small elite society to a mass society. In previous decades, when the Haredim constituted a small elite society, studying the Daf Yomi was looked down upon in the elite Yeshivot of Hebron, Ponevezh, Mir, and Brisk. The scholarly and cultural ideal was that of rarified, highly abstract and original analysis of abstruse Talmudic and Halachic issues mainly in regard to Torts (נזיקין) and laws of sacrifice (קודשים). The Daf Yomi, which consists of reading and understanding pages of text, was for lay people (בעלי בתים), not for Talmidei Chachamim (advanced Yeshiva students) and no one would have thought of publicly celebrating it.

As Haredi society grew numerically, however, it needed a cultural ideal appropriate for a mass population. After all, only very few are fit for exclusive devotion to highly abstract and involved

discussions of esoteric Talmudic topics. Thus, the Haredi world gradually adopted Daf Yomi as a cultural ideal for its ever-burgeoning population. In tandem, it began celebrating this project, upon the completion of the Talmud every seven and a half years, characteristically using it to showcase its increasing social and political power.

In the Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox sectors, Daf Yomi represents the opposite trend to that of the Haredim. If it represents something of a decline of Torah achievement in the Haredi world, in the Religious Zionist world it represents the contrary. The Religious Zionist world and especially its youth has great difficulty with Talmud study. Despite the long hours devoted to it in primary and especially secondary schools, as many religious Zionist educators testify, Religious Zionist youth do not like to study Talmud nor are they proficient at it. Such youth is heavily exposed to Western culture and involved discussions of topics that are remote from their experience is not something that they relate to easily. In this context, some of the Daf Yomi classes, videos and podcasts which aim to give over much information in an efficient and user-friendly way as possible, provide a “second chance” to study Talmud and appreciate it.

The new approachability of the Talmud text has been especially meaningful for women. Long excluded from Talmud study, in recent decades the ideal of equal access to sacred knowledge has crossed the gender divide. The new approachability of the text means that women who had never studied Talmud before

can follow classes, whether live or on-line, and study page after page until they finish the entire work. As many observers have claimed, such new empowerment can have unforeseen ramifications, not only for women but for Talmud itself. Women bring to Talmud study totally new experiences, perspectives and knowledge. Talmud study may never be the same again.

### Gershom Scholem, Jacob Frank

The Talmud represents traditional Jewish religious culture. However, Jewish life today is neither very traditional nor very religious. One of the most important and original voices analyzing this trend was Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), Professor of Jewish Mysticism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Interest in Scholem was renewed this year with the translation of David Biale’s biography into Hebrew, *Gershom Scholem*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 2020. (The English version, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah* was first published in the Jewish Lives series by Yale University Press in 2018.) The biography received extensive reviews in both *Haaretz* and in *Makor Rishon*, that is, on both sides of the political-religious spectrum.

Biale, while acknowledging Scholem’s mastery of philological and minute historical analysis, places the emphasis on Scholem’s vision of Jewish history and his Zionist ideology. Scholem, of course, was not only a professor of Jewish mysticism but the founder of the entire academic discipline, as it were, ex nihilo. This project was connected with Scholem’s vision of a Jewish “counter-history.” Through numerous and influential books and

articles, Scholem wove a narrative which placed the roots of Jewish modernity in the esoteric Kabbalistic lore and writings of medieval Spain. The Kabbalistic myth of the exile of the *Shekhina* (God's indwelling presence in the world) amid the forces of darkness pointed to the fact that one could recover and redeem the sacred aspects of the profane and even of evil. This idea, which was given extensive expression in the Zohar, was developed over the course of hundreds of years. It was especially developed in the Kabbalah of R. Yitzchak Luria (16<sup>th</sup> century) who described the

**According to Scholem's "counter-history," authentic traditional Judaism does not only consist of the Talmud and Halacha but also of the Kabbalistic alternative.**

recovery and repair of the "holy sparks" of the Shekhina as the process of redemption. According to Scholem, this idea finally exploded in the Sabbatean movement after the apostasy of Shabbtai Zevi ("the false Messiah") in 1666.

Shabbtai Zevi and especially his followers and successors, notably Jacob Frank (1726-1791, Poland) elaborated an antinomian theology which claimed that violation of the Halacha was more holy and on a higher spiritual plane than observing it, and that this violation would achieve the Redemption.

Scholem's most daring and controversial claim was that this mystical emancipation from the Halacha was one of the groundworks of the

Jewish Enlightenment and modern secular Judaism. According to Scholem's "counter-history," authentic traditional Judaism does not only consist of the Talmud and Halacha but also of the Kabbalistic alternative, a few significant branches of which negated the Halacha. As a corollary, he argued that Jewish modernity was not only a result of external Western forces, but also an indigenous development from within authentic Jewish tradition. Scholem's hope was that Zionism and the State of Israel would cultivate this internally based non-Halachic Jewish culture.

In addition to Scholem's biography, an important Polish novel, *The Books of Jacob* by the Nobel Prize laureate Olga Tokarczuk, newly translated into Hebrew, also explores the Frankist Movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century Poland and Central Europe. Employing a panoramic vista that includes Frankists, their rabbinic opponents, the Catholic Church, and Polish nobility, it explores Frankist claims and aspirations to emancipation and its ties to the emerging Polish and Jewish modernity. As the reviews in both left-wing and right-wing newspapers indicate, Scholem (and his areas of research and scholarship – Messianism, Kabbalah, and Sabbatianism) remains relevant to Israeli culture and politics on several levels.

First, during a time of intense debates concerning the teaching of Jewish culture and tradition in the general public schools and charges of forced "religionization" (*hadata*) of children from secular families, Scholem's vision of an authentic and indigenous non-Halachic Jewish culture raises

interesting possibilities. Indeed, Kabbalah holds a significant place within the Jewish renewal movement.

Secondly, Scholem's notion of "counter-history" raises the question of the "real" forces moving Jewish history. As Israel debates the issue of annexation of parts of the West Bank (the Greater Land of Israel), it is worth recalling that the ideology that played an important role in the original settlement effort – R. Abraham Isaac Kook's religious philosophy – is an interpretation of R. Isaac Luria's Kabbalistic Messianism. In fact, one could argue, along with Scholem, that the ideological debate dividing Israel today is, at bottom, a debate about the nature of Luria's vision of the messianic process and the redemption. The left-wing Zionists are the heirs of the Sabbatians who participated, according to Scholem, in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, while the Right-wing Zionists are their Orthodox, but no less messianic opponents.

### Diaspora Voices

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), George Steiner (1929-2020), and Albert Memmi (1920-2020)

Three important, if very different, 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish thinkers came to attention in the last year, R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, George Steiner, and Albert Memmi. Abraham Joshua Heschel came to the attention of the Hebrew reader with the re-issuing of *Man Walks in the World: Conversations with Abraham Joshua Heschel*.

First issued in the 1975, this volume was edited by the late Prof. Pinchas Peli and contains interviews and conversations with Rabbi Heschel. The new edition contains essays by contemporary scholars on Heschel and his thought.

Heschel's thought should be understood against the background of American and American Jewish life in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. (Born in Poland, Heschel emigrated to the United States in 1938 from Germany.) Against a context in which America enjoyed paramount material success and religion was increasingly becoming a matter of personal choice and fulfillment, Heschel emphasized that God is outside of human beings and calls to them, making ethical and spiritual demands. Heschel emphasized the transcendent, ineffable nature of God and religious experience and asserted that when one does mitzvot and experiences holiness, one touches something that is beyond the merely human. It is in this framework that mindful prayer with tallit and tefillin (in the Upper West Side's Gerer shtetle) and marching for civil rights with Martin Luther King were of one piece. Heschel should be a significant figure both for American and Israeli Judaism. He challenges the spiritual banality of the American Jewish experience and reminds Israelis of the importance of ethics and a universalistic outlook for Judaism.

The noted critic and literary scholar George Steiner passed away in February 2020 at the age of 90. Though thoroughly secular, Steiner's Jewishness played a key role in both his identity

and his writing. For Steiner (as for other Central European Jewish intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt) the Jew is the eternal stranger and outsider who makes the demand for moral perfection and the utopian ordering of society. Steiner understood anti-Semitism as the instinctual "polytheistic" revolt against those demands. Steiner's most famous claim was also tied up with his Jewishness. Steiner argued that the Holocaust and other manifestations of 20th century political bestiality grew upon the very ground of European literary humanism. "We know that some of the men who devised and administered Auschwitz had been taught to read Shakespeare or Goethe, and continued to do so." This fact, argued Steiner, undermines the entire enterprise of studying and teaching literature. What is the point of literature if it does not lead to humane action but rather to barbarity?

In accordance with his view of the Jew as the eternal stranger and outsider, Steiner was non- or anti-Zionist. In his well-known essay "Our Homeland, the Text," he argued that the attempt to build a physical Temple was a mistake. The Jewish homeland is not physical but rather the text, with its "transcendent mobility," is the

best strategy for survival in the Exile. Called the "last Viennese Jew," Steiner represents a Central European Jewish intellectual sensibility that may not be with us anymore.

Albert Memmi also passed away in May 2020, nearly a hundred years old. Memmi was one of the founders of post-colonial theory and an important French intellectual in the period after the Second World War. In his essays and novels (particularly those with an autobiographical character), he examined and analyzed the identity of North African Jews that had ceased observing the religious tradition and left the ghetto but were not fully accepted in the North African Arab societies of Tunisia and Morocco, nor in the French culture and society that they were exposed to in the schools of Alliance Israelite Universelle or the university. In fact, these Jews had an affiliation with three identities without being able to fully adopt any of them. Memmi developed a judicious humanist approach, which supported Zionism and the State of Israel together with the national aspirations of Arab societies (including the Palestinians). He succeeded in cultivating these views as a full participant in the literary and intellectual life of France.

# DEVELOPMENTS OF NOTE 2020

## RESEARCH: GOD

The well-known Hebrew University Bible scholar, Yair Zackovitz published a book in 2019 devoted to the biblical idea of God: *The Bible: The Revolution of God* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2019). Zackovitz's thesis and the importance of the book concerns the double-edged complexity of this idea: On the one hand the biblical monotheistic God constitutes a fundamental revolution vis a vis the idolatrous, polytheistic culture of the ancient Middle East. Yet on the other hand, the Bible and the ancient Israelites continued to talk about the one God and characterize and worship Him in terms taken from this pagan culture (to the point that archaeological inscriptions assign YHWH-Shomron an Ashera-Consort.) The heart of the book is the relationship between the uniqueness of Israel and its religion and its membership in its regional cultural, political and religious context.

## DISPUTE: LEFT

Prof. Nissim Mizrachi of the Sociology and Anthropology Department of Tel Aviv University raised quite a stir through an extensive interview he gave to the weekend magazine of the very liberal *Haaretz* newspaper (December 19, 2019). He pointed out the shortcomings the "critical sociology" that have been dominant in the Israeli universities for the past 20 years. According to the analysis of this approach, the Zionist Ashkenazic "hegemony" had in various ways exploited oppressed or excluded subordinate groups in Israeli society, such as Palestinians, Mizrachim (Jews from North Africa and the Middle East) and women. Mizrachi argued that this sociological approach cannot explain the most salient political and social fact of Israeli society, the massive support that the Mizrachi population gives to the Zionist, right-wing Likud party. According to the critical approach, the Mizrachim, together with the Palestinians and other groups, such as women and LGBTQ, should form an active left-wing opposition. Mizrachi stated that this expectation demonstrates that Israeli sociology has no real understanding of the object of its research: the Israeli population. Mizrachi suggested that sociological research should attempt to empathically understand the nationalist and traditional views of the majority of the population and why this population does not feel liberated by left-wing views, but rather feels threatened by them.

## HISTORY: FEMINISM

George Steiner's characterization of Jews as eternal outsiders was given an American illustration in the television mini-series "Mrs. America." The series portrays the struggle between feminist and conservative women around the (failed) ratification of the equal rights amendment (ERA) in the 1970s. Among the four feminist protagonists two and a half are Jewish: Betty Friedan and Rep. Bella Abzug were fully Jewish, the third, feminist icon Gloria Steinem had a Jewish father and the family identified Jewishly.

(The fourth feminist protagonist was Shirley Chisholm, the black Congresswoman from NY.) The conservative women's side was led by Phyllis Schlafly, who surprisingly led a successful campaign against the ratification of the amendment. Mrs. Schlafly (portrayed by Cate Blanchett) is well-mannered and uses all the conventions of white upper-class femininity (lipstick, high heels etc.) to her advantage. While it is clear that at least in part, the Jewish feminists were motivated by a Jewish sense of justice, their "outsiderness," represented by their strident manners and their remoteness from ordinary housewives, doomed their project to failure. Not only would George Steiner recognize the dynamics described by the series but so, perhaps, would Nissim Mizrachi.